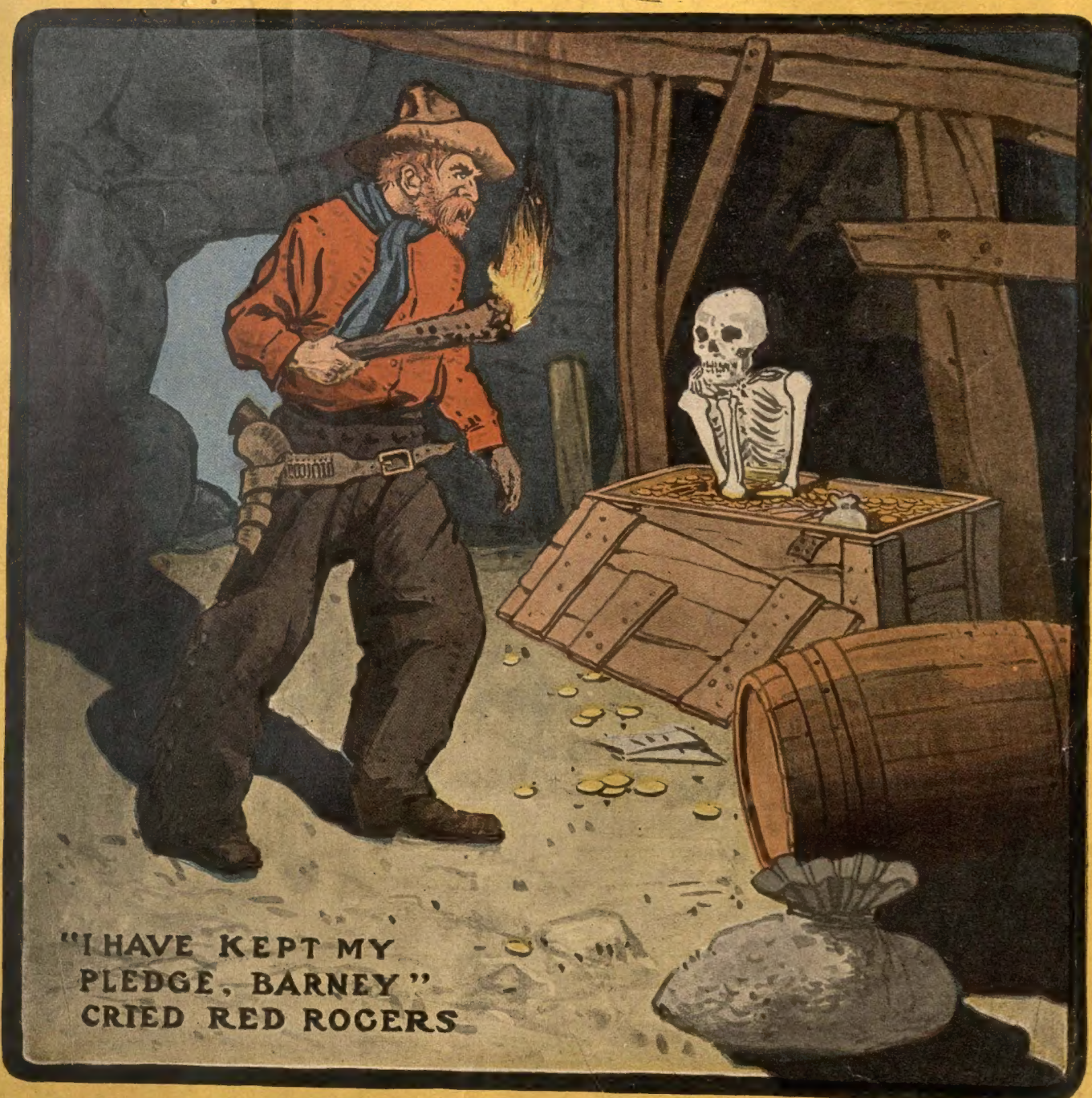


EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

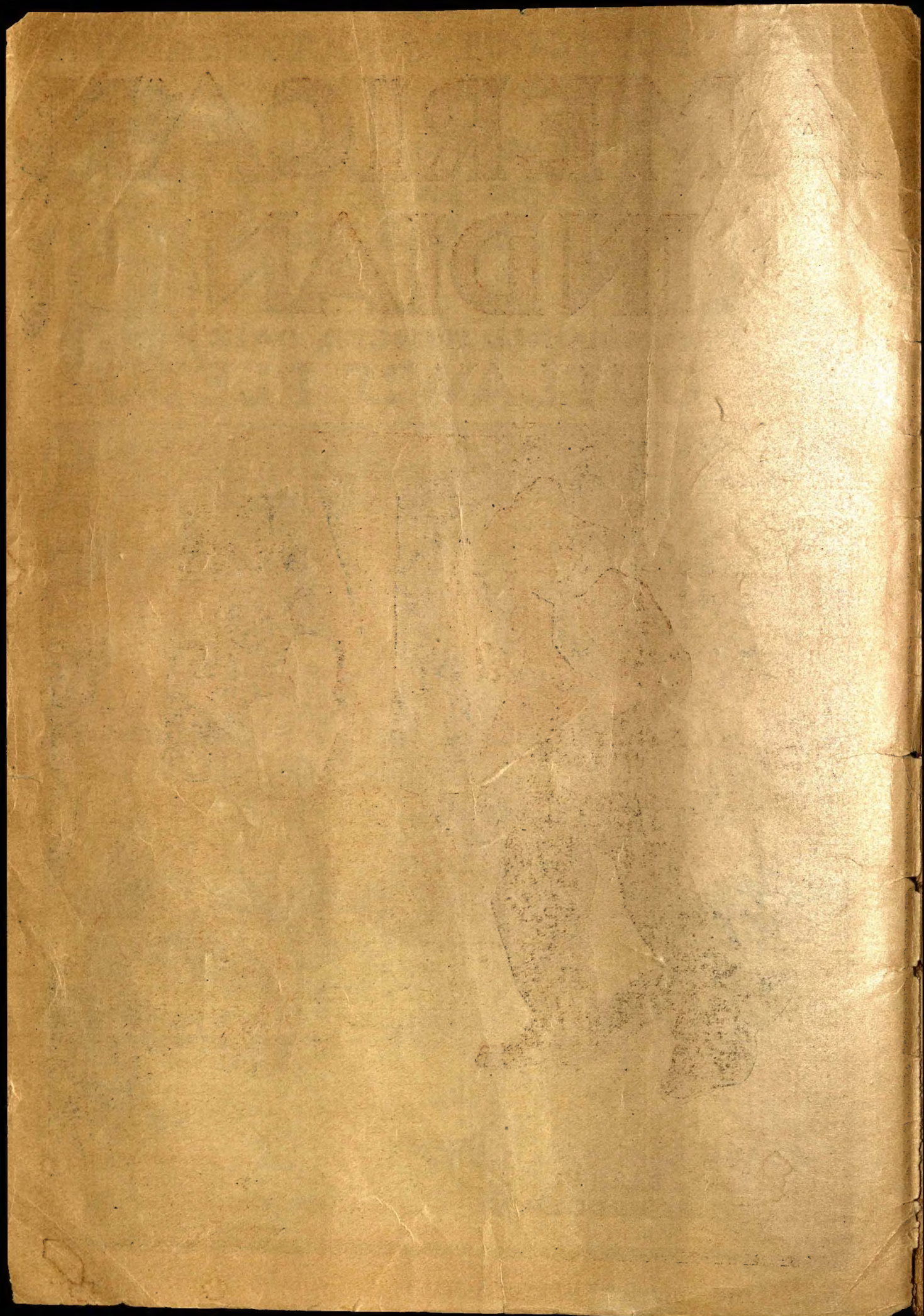
AN OUTLAW'S PLEDGE



"I HAVE KEPT MY
PLEDGE, BARNEY"
CRIED RED ROGERS

No. 1 THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

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AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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AN OUTLAW'S PLEDGE

OR

THE RAID ON THE OLD STOCKADE

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

RED ROGERS—A daredevil outlaw, who has broken from jail, killing four men in his escape, and returns to the scenes of his early crimes, that he may carry out a pledge made to a dying member of his gang, being pursued and eluding hundreds of troopers before he is finally sent to his doom, at the Old Stockade.

ROSE LONDON—Daughter of the man to whom Red Rogers made his pledge, who helped the outlaw to break jail and then accompanied him on his dash into the Bad Lands to carry out his vow. Repenting of her vicious life, she finally marries a young trooper whom Rogers has captured.

PEDRO—A former member of Red Rogers' gang, who also assisted in his escape from jail, and, after accompanying the outlaw to the mountains, is captured by the troopers.

JENNINGS, SHAW, SCOTTY—Members of the Mounted Scouts, who have their horses stolen by the outlaw, and are afterwards taken prisoners by him and held as hostages.

ALKALI—A half-breed scout, who eventually tracks Red Rogers to his doom.

COLONEL EDWARDS—Commandant of Fort Griswold, the officer who takes charge of the pursuit of the outlaw. Troopers, Deputy Marshals and Sheriffs and their posses.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNAL.

"His-s-t!"

With startling suddenness, the cry shattered the stillness of the night that lay upon the foothills of the "Bad Lands."

As they heard it, three men who, rolled in their army blankets, were sleeping in the protecting shadow of a huge boulder, rose to their elbows and peered into the darkness, at the same time whipping out their "Colts" with their free hands.

But only the silence of the night, seeming more intense as the echo of the strident cry died away, greeted them.

"That must have been a signal," breathed one of the trio, after several minutes of listening.

"If it was a signal, it would have been answered," rejoined a companion.

"Sure it would," asserted the third member of the party.

"Then what was it?" demanded the first.

"May have been a snake, or a mountain lion," suggested the man who had doubted the startling cry being a signal.

"Snake? Mountain lion?" repeated the other, in disgust. "Say, you'd better go back to the recruits till you learn the difference between a human voice and an animal's cry."

The three men were members of the Mounted Scouts, out on patrol duty from their station at Fort Griswold.

Two of them had been in the service three years, while the other was on his first detail, having only just been promoted from the band of recruits at the Fort.

Consequently, the sneering allusion to his inexperience cut deep, and he was about to retort fiercely, when the third scout prevented.

"Jennings is right, Scotty. It was a man's voice uttered that cry," he whispered.

"Then what does it mean?" persisted the youngster.

"Just keep yer tongue in yer head and yer eyes and ears open, and we may find out," grunted Jennings.

This reply had the intended result of effectually silencing the recruit, and, with every sense alert, the three men awaited some sound that would explain the mysterious signal.

Unlike most details of mounted scouts that patrolled together, there was no affection, bred by perils and dangers shared, between the men. Indeed, there was not even good feeling. The veterans, Jennings and Shaw, had long been rivals for the honor of being the best shot at the Fort, and both resented being sent out with a "rookie."

The personnel of the patrol, however, had been arranged by Colonel Edwards, commandant of the Fort, with a purpose.

So many had become the raids and robberies that the officers began to suspect connivance between the outlaws and some of the scouts, and the names of Jennings and Shaw had been linked with these rumors.

Knowing the rivalry existing between them, the colonel had decided to send them out together, confident that each would be only too willing to report any suspicious actions of the other, and, to prevent such an anomaly as an alliance in wrong doing, he had added the recruit, instructing each to report in detail all that his companions did.

The surprise of being awakened from his sleep had driven the memory of these orders from the youngster's mind. But as the monotony of the watch grew, they recurred to him.

"I'll bet that was a signal for either Jennings or Shaw," he said to himself, "and whichever it is, is afraid

to answer because I'm here. I'll have to keep my head about me all right, all right."

But the recruit's suspicions did his fellow members of the Mounted Scouts injustice—as he was soon to learn.

With a suddenness almost as startling as the mysterious signal, came the thumpety-thump of a stone as, dislodged from its resting place, it bounded down the mountainside.

"That's above us," breathed Jennings, leaping to his feet and feeling his way cautiously to the edge of the boulder, whence he strove to penetrate the inky darkness that enveloped crags and trees alike.

As their companion jumped to his feet, Shaw and Scotty did likewise, following him as he crept along the rock.

"What do you make of it?" queried the veteran of his fellow.

"Somebody's discovered us and is either trying to get away or to warn others," asserted Jennings, with positiveness.

"But how could any one see us in the shadow of the boulder?" demanded Scotty, resenting the indifference of his companions to his presence.

"Men who can travel these hills in the night, don't have to see a man to know he's around, they can smell him," returned Shaw.

"Say, you fellows might as well cut this jollying out right now," flashed the youngster. "I'm not going to stand for it any longer—either you'll treat me decently or I'll mix it up with fists or guns, whichever you like. Smell a man, rats!"

"Now don't get het up, rookie," rejoined Jennings. "Shaw's right. A good woodsman or an Injun can scent a man as easy as you can a grizzly. Besides, if they didn't scent us, they could the horses."

"Queer we ain't heard a whimper from the cayuses," exclaimed Shaw, as his comrade's mention of their mounts recalled their existence. "My old Bonehead usually don't like these night surprises."

"You don't suppose whoever it was has stolen 'em?" suggested Scotty, to whose excited brain nothing seemed impossible.

"What, take three iron shod horses and me and Shaw not know it?" snorted Jennings. "It would be easier to have 'em run off with one of us."

"Just the same, I'm going down to see if they're all right," declared the recruit, moving away.

"Hold on. We'll go with you," whispered Shaw.

"Being nervous, as they will, you may scare 'em—and we'd be in a pretty fix fifty miles from the Fort and no ponies."

And, placing the youngster between them, the veteran scouts crept cautiously down to the plateau, some fifteen yards from the boulder, where they had left the horses to feed on the sweet grass.

Already, the heavy darkness in the east was giving way to the grey-greens of dawn, enabling the three scouts to make out the outlines of the rocks and trees above them.

But, as they turned a crag whence they could get a glimpse of the plateau, they stopped in amazement.

Not a horse was to be seen!

"So they couldn't steal our ponies with you and Shaw 'round?" grinned Scotty.

"Keep your tongue in your head," growled Jennings. "That cry probably frightened 'em, and they've gone down the trail. Come on. It won't be hard to track them."

Again were the scouts destined to be surprised, however.

Though the steadily-increasing light enabled them to find the shoe-prints, where the animals had moved about during the night and those made when they entered the plateau, not a trace could they find, indicating the direction of their departure!

With blank faces, the two veterans stared at one another.

As they stood in baffled perplexity, of a sudden, from above, there rang out a mocking laugh.

Whirling, Colts ready, the scouts looked up.

Outlined against the sky, stood a powerfully-built man, red of hair and beard, wearing a scarlet shirt.

"Red Rogers!" gasped Jennings and Shaw, in chorus.

Another jeering laugh greeted the exclamation, then with a defiant wave of his hand, the figure disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

SCOTTY LEARNS SOMETHING ABOUT THE "SERVICE."

"No more mystery about what's become of our ponies," growled Shaw, giving relief to his feelings in a torrent of curses.

"You mean Red took them?" queried Jennings.

"My, but you're getting to be the quick little thinker."

"Well, if he did, I'd like to know the trick. Red's cute, I know, yet it's some stunt to get three horses up a mountain on a dark night without leaving any trail."

"Oh, we'll be able to learn how it was done when it gets lighter. Now, let's get back to the boulder before Red swipes our rifles, blankets and saddles while our backs are turned."

"Lot of good our saddles will do us now," grunted Jennings. "Red might as well have taken 'em."

The silence of his comrades, deeply ashamed that they should have been tricked of their horses without even knowing it, gave Scotty the first chance to speak since the discovery of the man on the rock and he lost no time in making the most of it.

"But that can't be Red Rogers, he's in jail!" he exclaimed.

"Was, you mean," corrected Shaw, with a feeble attempt at raillery. "I didn't know he'd got out. But no other man than Red Rogers ever had hair and beard like that."

"What would he want of our horses, and how'd he know we were here, anyway?" asked Scotty.

"Scented us," asserted Jennings, positively, answering the last question first. "I told you a good woodsman or an Injun can always scent a man—and Red Rogers can give any Injun or woodsman cards and spades and then beat him at his own game. As to why he took our ponies, he probably wanted 'em."

"I have it!" cried Shaw, slapping his thigh. "I'll bet Red has just broken jail. He's probably hiking it to his old hiding place, and, coming across our ponies, helped himself."

"But they're army horses. They'll be recognized by any one who sees 'em," objected the youngster.

"Little Red cares," returned Shaw. "Possession is nine-tenths, it's the *whole* law to him—and he's quick enough with his gun to defend anything he decides is his."

"I suppose we ought to be thankful Red didn't need shooting irons, or he'd probably have helped himself to our rifles," exclaimed Jennings, as they found their weapons and blankets undisturbed.

"Oh, cut it out," retorted Shaw. "We'll have to stand enough joshing from the boys at the Fort, without your trying to get funny."

"Scotty, start a fire and put on the coffee pot—there's enough water in it."

And, while the youngster obeyed, the others rolled up their blankets.

"What are you going to do with the saddles and bridles?" asked Scotty, as he joined them.

"Leave 'em in the cave yonder, so's they'll be waiting when we get our horses back," declared Shaw, picking up his own and carrying it to a crevice in the rocks, some ten feet away, into which, after a short examination, he placed the now useless accoutrements.

"Then you're going to track Red?" asked the youngster, in surprise.

"Surest thing you know, kid. We've not only got to trail him, *but we've got to get back our ponies!*" rejoined Jennings. "If it should get out how Red tricked us, and then we didn't recover the cayuses, the Mounted Scouts would never be able to hold down the gun men, horse thieves and outlaws ever again.

"It's the knowledge that the Mounted Scouts never let up when they want a man that makes 'em feared!"

"That's what!" chimed in Shaw. "You're working for the honor of the Mounted Scouts now, not merely for Uncle Sam, Scotty. Remember, if you get done to death, there'll be another to take up the task from where you dropped."

This forceful explanation of the simple but unrelenting code of the Service impressed the youngster as nothing else could, and he grew silent in contemplation of the dangers entailed.

Of all the outlaws who made the "Bad Lands" their hiding place, dashing forth to raid an isolated settlement, rob a bank or hold up a train, there was none whose name caused such terror or who had such a reputation for dare-devil fearlessness as Red Rogers.

It had taken the Mounted Scouts three years of ceaseless trailing to run him down—and the presence of a full squad to effect his capture.

Indeed, his arrest had done more to inspire a wholesome respect for the Mounted Scouts in the breasts of desperadoes and renegade Indians than any other of their acts.

And here the notorious bandit was back in his old haunts after serving less than five years of his life sentence—and he had given notice of his liberty by running off with three horses belonging to his mortal enemies, from right under their very noses.

"How do you suppose he broke jail?" asked Scotty, as the three crest-fallen men squatted cross-legged about the fire eating their beans and sipping the coffee.

"We'll hear—if we ever see any one from the Fort again. But, I'll stake my saddle against a blanket pin he left a trail of blood if any one was in his way," responded Jennings.

This suggestion that they might never live to return from the pursuit sent Scotty's heart into his throat.

"If we ever see any one from the Fort?" he repeated in dismay. "Aren't we going back to get horses and reinforcements?"

Their eyes twinkling, the veterans looked at one another and laughed.

"Say, have you forgotten your 'rules and regulations' so quick?" demanded Shaw. "Don't you remember that only in 'cases of dire emergency may a scout give up a trail and return to the Fort?'" he added, drawling in imitation of the colonel when quizzing the recruits.

"Well, isn't this such an occasion?" returned the youngster.

"Hardly," rejoined Jennings. "We're not dead, we're not injured, we're——"

"But we've lost our ponies," interrupted Scotty.

"And it's up to us to get 'em back," declared the veteran. "To save you a 'twigging' by the colonel, the sooner you get it into your noddle that 'dire emergency' means only when you're so wounded you can't get back to the post, the better."

"So, as soon as you've finished grub, we'll be starting."

"I'm game," rejoined the youngster. "It seems to me, though, we ought to get some word to the Fort that Red Rogers is loose."

"They'll hear of it, right enough. Don't worry about that," declared Jennings. "I'll stake my Colt they knew it before we did."

"Still, as this is the trail the others will have to hit to get to Red's hang out, it won't do any harm to leave word we're without ponies," suggested his fellow veteran. And, no objection being made, the scout produced a stub of a pencil from his breeches and wrote laboriously on a piece of paper torn from a can label.

"Read it," commanded Jennings, as the task was completed.

Willingly Shaw obeyed.

"Red Rogers lifted our ponies early Thursday morning. We're hitting the trail. All well. Shaw, Jennings, Scotty."

"But you didn't say anything about the saddles," exclaimed the youngster, as the reading was completed.

"Sure not. Whoever follow us won't need two sad-

dles, and besides, we'll want 'em ourselves when we get back our ponies," returned Shaw.

"Then, if we're going, let's be on our way," said Jennings.

And, getting to their feet, the Scouts quickly packed their outfits.

CHAPTER III.

TRAPPED.

Having adjusted their blankets to their shoulders, Shaw set about finding a suitable hiding place for his note, while his fellow comrade made ready a "broken staff"—a sign which, seen by any Mounted Scout, told him that important information had been hidden by a fellow member of the service.

The preparation of the symbol was simple.

Cutting a green branch from a near-by shrub, Jennings broke the top, letting the end hang down, and then set the "broken staff" in the middle of the trail, with the hanging tip on the side toward the spot where Shaw had hidden the note—which happened to be under a stone placed against the boulder.

Interestedly the youngster watched the placing of this signal that served as a method of communication between the scouts not in the "rules and regulations," being one of the many signs that had been devised by the men themselves and, therefore, only to be learned by experience.

"Suppose some one else sees the signal. Won't they remove it or read the note?" asked Scotty.

"Not much," returned Shaw. "That the 'broken staff' is one of the Scouts' signals is known to most travelers of the trails. But, just what it means, they don't know, and they have a mighty wholesome respect for it. Why, I've seen men ride ten feet around one of 'em so's to be sure not to interfere with it."

"But, hasn't any scout told what it means?"

"Not yet!" returned Jennings, with an emphasis that was significant. "And there's a bullet waiting for the man who betrays the secret signals of the Mounted Scouts. It's a part of our unwritten code. You'll find, kiddo, after you've served a bit, that there's more in our unwritten rules than in the ones the colonel beat into your noddle."

"But, how can I learn them?" the youngster inquired, his eagerness to master the mysteries of his calling evident in his voice.

"By keeping your eyes and ears open when you're on patrol," replied Shaw.

During the latter part of this conversation, the trio had made their way, for a second time, down to the plateau, whence their horses had been spirited away.

And, as Shaw had predicted, the sunlight enabled them to learn the manner of their silent departure.

Dropping to his knees with a sudden exclamation, the veteran studied intently for a few minutes the ground surrounding a spot where the shoe prints showed where one of the horses had stood, then got up, a look of utter disgust on his face.

"Say, Jennings, you and me ought to go back to the 'rookie' school," he snorted. "Red worked the old game of binding the hoofs in rags, and here we never thought of it."

Without reply, the other veteran scanned the marks discovered by his fellow, evincing his confirmation by a corroborative nod of his head as he rose to his feet.

But his next move showed that he did not take the trick calmly.

"You may have caught us napping this time, Red Rogers!" he hissed, shaking his fist menacingly. "But, before Andy Jennings is through with you, you'll wish you'd never lifted his pony!"

"Same here," grunted Shaw.

And without more ado, the three scouts who had been so humiliated by the notorious outlaw, took up the task of recovering their horses and bringing the desperadoes to justice.

Cautiously, with eye and ears alert, they followed the tracks up the mountainside.

Far above them, on a plateau to the right of the trail, a different scene was presented.

At the back of the shelf of land, which was some forty feet wide, rose a wall of rock, severed by a wide cleft. Deep within this, the fitful flare of a camp fire glowed, disclosing the forms of two men and a woman, while browsing contentedly near the entrance, but on the plateau, were the three army horses.

Fairly bristling were the men with guns and knives, while only by her skirts did the girl differ in appearance from her companions, for she, too, wore a cartridge belt about her waist, into which were thrust two six shooters and a bowie-knife.

"It was worth all the risk to hear the scouts cry 'Red Rogers,'" declared the outlaw, as he recounted the incidents of his discovery to his companions.

And jeering were the comments made upon the stupidity of the scouts by the others.

"What do you suppose they'll do now, go back to the Fort for reinforcements?" asked the girl.

"Most likely," asserted the other man.

But the outlaw held a different opinion.

"I'll bet all the gold in my belt against a pebble they're on our trail now. That's why I left the horses on the plateau where they could be seen."

"But what's the use of running the risk of a gun shot so soon, Red?" demanded the girl.

"There won't be any risk, Rosie," returned the desperado. "But, even if there was, I'd take it. I need those scouts as bad as we did their horses."

This statement puzzled Red's companions. For a few moments they sought to reason it out, then gave it up and asked, almost in the same breath.

"Why?"

"Because with them in my power, I can make some sort of terms in case the other scouts surround me. If I'd had a couple of hostages, I'd never have been caught the last time."

Readily recognizing the advantage such a capture would give them, the girl jumped to her feet.

"Let's go out and see if they're trailing us," she exclaimed, hurrying to the mouth of the cave.

But, before she could pass out onto the plateau, Red halted her.

"Come back here, Rosie," he commanded. "If you're so keen to know, I'll find out. While I'm willing to let the scouts see the ponies, I want them to think I'm asleep."

These words showed plainly the calculating cunning of the bandit.

As he reached the mouth of the cave, Red dropped on his belly and with infinite caution wormed himself across the plateau to the edge.

And the sight that greeted his eyes almost caused him to shout with glee.

Climbing steadily, came the three scouts.

Easily could the outlaw have picked them off with his rifle. But, as he explained to Rosie, he wanted them alive.

Stealthily working his way back, Red re-entered the cave.

"Come on. They're almost here," he chuckled,

grimly. "Pedro, you take the first man. Let him get far enough onto the plateau so the second one won't turn back. I'll take him. Rosie, you cover the third fellow with your six shooters. When Pedro and I have bound our men, we'll attend to yours."

"Careful, now. Pedro, bring the lariats. Down on your bellies. There are some rocks we can hide behind. Remember—a sound may spoil the whole game."

With consummate stealth, the desperadoes gained their hiding places and, every sense alert, awaited the scouts' appearance.

In utter ignorance of the trap laid for them, Jennings, Shaw and Scotty toiled up the trail, in the order named.

Without difficulty, they had traced the route taken by the horses because the iron shoes against the rocky trail had cut the rags, leaving telltale prints here and there.

With the sun, the wind had arisen and as a gust blew down from the direction of the plateau, Jennings stopped in his tracks, sniffed the air excitedly, then threw his rifle to a "ready."

"Our ponies are close at hand. I smell 'em;" he breathed to his companions. "Watch out, now. Don't shoot until you can make your shot count."

Cautiously the trio resumed their ascent.

And as Jennings' head rose above the level of the plateau, again he stopped.

But this time he did not speak.

Holding up three fingers, he nodded toward the shelf of rock, then beckoned his companions to join him, placing his fingers on his lips to enjoin silence.

With rifle butts at their shoulders, the scouts mounted the plateau in single file.

The sight of the ponies brought grins of delight to their faces.

"Where can Red be?" breathed Scotty.

"Asleep, probably," returned Shaw.

But scarce had the words left their lips than the scouts were made aware of their falsity.

With yells, bloodcurdling in their ferocity, the outlaw and Pedro leaped upon the backs of Shaw and Jennings, respectively, carrying them to the ground, while Rosie, boring the muzzles of her six shooters into Scotty's back, hissed:

"Move a muscle, and I'll pump your carcass full of lead!"

CHAPTER IV.

JENNINGS' ATTEMPT ON RED'S LIFE IS FOILED.

So utterly unexpected was the attack that neither Jennings nor Shaw were able to resist as they were borne to the ground.

Their anger, however, at being tricked by the notorious outlaw a second time—for that their captors were none other than Red Rogers and his band the scouts did not need to be told—gave the frenzy of fury to their strength and they grappled with their assailants desperately.

Naturally powerful, the trained muscles of the scouts enabled them to pitch and toss the outlaws about the plateau. But, strive as he might, neither could break the vice-like hold about his neck.

Summoning all his strength, with a mighty effort, Jennings managed to get to his knees.

Like a maddened bull, Red Rogers snorted and puffed as he strove to force his captive down again. But the years of confinement in prison had sapped his former titanic strength, and it flashed to his mind that only by trickery could he overcome the wiry Scout.

Realizing the outlaw's lack of condition, as he felt his grip relax when he gained his knees, Jennings took courage.

But his joy was short lived.

With tremendous force, Red Rogers drove his knee into the spine of the Scout, at the same time jerking him backwards.

Powerless to resist, Jennings was flat on the plateau, and in a trice the outlaw was kneeling upon his chest, his flushed face grinning in triumph.

Shaw, however, had been no match for Pedro, and, cursing and squirming, was being securely roped by the bandit.

Fascinated, Scotty and the girl had watched the men struggling for mastery as they rolled about the plateau.

As it became evident that his fellows could not overcome the advantage gained by the outlaws in their rear attack, the youngster gritted his teeth at his impotence, then suddenly whirled upon the girl, swinging his arm in an attempt to knock the six shooters from her hands.

But Rosie was not to be caught napping.

Dodging the blow cleverly, she levelled her guns at the scout's head.

"Don't try that again," she exclaimed, quietly. "It's lucky for you, Red didn't see your move, or he'd make me

drop you in your tracks. I suppose I'm a fool for not doing it, but you seem so young," she added, whimsically.

But bitterly was Red destined to repent the girl's soft-heartedness.

Pedro, however, noticed the changed position of the scout as he got to his feet after putting the last knot in Shaw's bonds and with an oath he was upon him.

"I'll fix you so you can't do any damage," he grunted, as he slipped a noose over Scotty's right hand, passed the rawhide lariat behind his back, took a turn about the left wrist and jerked both arms behind his back. "Rosie, you ought to have dropped him. He might have got you, and then things wouldn't have been so easy for Red and me."

"Well, he didn't," smiled the girl, "so there's no harm done. Besides, he's worth more to us alive than dead."

This remark, audible to all three of the captives, set them to wondering to what purpose the outlaw intended to put them, and it did not improve the tempers of the veterans to think that members of the Mounted Scouts should be made to serve Red Rogers' ends.

The task of binding Jennings was finally accomplished, and, exhausted by their efforts, the bandits squatted near the edge of the plateau to rest.

Pedro's method of binding the prisoners had been thorough. Tying the hands of each behind his back, he had taken two turns of the lariat about the upper arms, made a knot and then run the rawhide down the prisoner's back to the ankles, which he bound with a half dozen turns.

In this manner, the captives were rendered powerless to get to their feet or to work their arms.

One way of motion was left to them, however—they could roll.

In silence, the outlaws gazed out upon the panorama of rocks and trees below them.

"Wonder how long it will take for news of your escape to reach the Fort," mused Pedro, at last, looking at his chief.

"They probably knew it six hours after we got away," returned Red. "It ain't like the old days, before there were telegraphs. Then, a man could break jail, get to cover and maybe pull off a raid before the news could be received. Now you can't more'n get out before the alarm has been sent to every Fort, sheriff and marshal.

"That's why I told Rosie to have you cut all the wires out of Keno before you came to the jail. Then I took the precaution to put the jailer's son out of commission

before I left. He was the only telegraph operator in town."

This bit of information as to the manner of the outlaw's escape was eagerly listened to by the prisoners, and from it they learned that at least one life, that of the operator, had been sacrificed by Red in obtaining his freedom. They realized, also, that his cunning in having the wires all cut before the escape was attempted would delay the alarm being sent to the Fort and they were wondering as to the other details of the jail delivery when their attention was once more attracted to their captors.

"That was two nights ago," exclaimed Rosie. "By this time, that old turkey gobbler of a colonel at Griswold has probably ordered out a regiment on our trail."

This suggestive nickname for their superior caused the scouts to smile, but intently they waited upon Red's reply.

"Sure thing. I'll stake the gold in my belt against an empty cartridge shell there are more than two hundred troopers within ten miles of us this very minute," the notorious bandit declared.

"Then let's get away from here quick," returned the girl, getting to her feet in evident alarm at the thought of so many pursuers in such proximity.

"Don't worry, Rosie," comforted Red. "We're practically safe because they don't know where to look for us. That's why I shot our ponies last night and shoved the carcasses into Ten Mile creek. They won't find 'em and, learning from Keno we had horses, they'll never think of looking for a foot trail. Still, we'll be going as soon as you've cooked some grub. It won't be safe to have a fire after to-day till we get to the old Stockade."

"Then I'll get busy right away," asserted the girl. "Somehow, I don't feel safe here, and if our going depends on me, it won't be long before we start."

Even as she spoke, Rosie walked toward the entrance of the cave and soon disappeared within the gaping maw of the crevice.

At the mention of the outlaw's destination, the scouts had been amazed. Often had they heard of the Old Stockade, but, as none of the Mounted Scouts at the Post had ever seen it—or knew its location—it had come to be regarded by the Service as a myth.

But Red's announcement was evidence of its existence, and excitedly Jennings and Shaw strove to recall the stories they had heard about it.

So far as either could remember, it was supposed to be

a fort built in the mountain fastnesses of the "Bad Lands" as a refuge against attacks from Indians by a score of men who had discovered a gold mine.

That Red knew its whereabouts surprised them, and bitterly they cursed their inability to compare notes as to the place, due to the distance their captors had left them apart.

To Jennings, in particular, the thought of being carried into captivity by the desperado was torture. In his heart, he believed he could have overpowered the fellow if he had been attacked anywhere than from behind. And the more his mind dwelled on this, the more furious he became.

Suddenly, an idea occurred to him, and, raising his head, he surveyed his captors.

Red Rogers, he saw, was sitting about a yard from the edge of the plateau, while his companion was some ten feet to his left, both intently searching the land below for a glimpse of any pursuers.

"Red Rogers may think he's rendered us powerless, but I'll show him the only time a Mounted Scout is powerless is when he's dead!" muttered Jennings to himself.

And, as he spoke, he put his plan in operation.

With infinite stealth, he rolled to his side, then turned completely over, and, when he looked at his captors again, he was a foot nearer the notorious outlaw.

Slowly, cautiously, he rolled nearer and nearer.

How desperate his scheme of hurling Red Rogers to his doom was can be realized from the fact that, were it successful, the bandit would probably clutch and drag the scout over the edge of the plateau with him, or, if the rattle of a stone or a glance backward betrayed his purpose, a bullet would doubtless be the penalty for his daring.

But the danger did not daunt Jennings.

"It's for the good of the Service," he bravely told himself.

At last, scarce a yard separated him from his victim.

Determined to risk all on a final roll, the scout summoned his strength and turned over and over with increasing rapidity.

Fearful lest the thumping of his heart would warn the outlaw, Jennings saw that another roll would bring success or failure to his attempt on Red's life.

But, before he could take it, he was foiled.

"Look out! The scout's on you! Oh, Red!" rang out the voice of the girl.

CHAPTER V.

THE DASH FOR LIFE.

Cursing frightfully, Red and Pedro leaped to their feet, whipping out their six shooters, as they faced about.

At a glance, the notorious outlaw took in the situation and as he realized the narrow margin of his escape, he glowered at the heroic scout, his face hideous from fury and hatred.

But Red never allowed his emotions to dull his brain.

Scarce a second had elapsed since Rosie's cry had warned the outlaw of his danger, and, realizing that the scout's impetus was so great he would be unable to stop himself from rolling over the edge of the plateau, he stepped over the body and started toward the cave.

Their attention attracted to their comrade by the girl's warning, Shaw and Scotty managed to turn so they could see what was transpiring. And as they beheld the bandit fiend step over their companion's body, their eyes became transfixed with horror.

So atrociously wanton was Red's act that the girl could not stand it.

"Seize him! Grab him!" she pleaded. "If you want to kill him, put a bullet into him—not that way."

But the outlaw's fury knew no bounds.

"Get into the cave—if you don't like it," he hissed.

With a shudder, Rose clapped her hands to her face while the scouts, unable to bear the sight of their comrade going to so awful a death, turned their heads away.

But Providence did not desert the brave Jennings—though his plan to send the terrible outlaw to his well deserved fate had been foiled.

For seconds that seemed eternal, the others awaited the crackling of the brush along the edge and the thump that should announce the fall of the prisoner.

At last, unable longer to bear the strain of suspense, Rosie peered between her fingers.

"He's saved! He's saved!" she shouted, exultantly.

"Pedro, get him and bring him to the cave."

At the cry, the outlaws and scouts alike had faced about.

In a declivity, whose existence had been hidden by grass, lay Jennings, midway between where Red Rogers had been sitting and the edge of the plateau!

As he realized the miracle of the scout's escape, the outlaw blanched.

"Get me some whiskey, Rosie," he stammered.

But the girl did not move.

"Tell me first what you're going to do," she retorted.

"What? You dare disobey me?" thundered the desperado, glad to have some one upon whom to vent his rage and disappointment. "I'll show you——"

Yet, as he wheeled, his threat died upon his lips.

With steady hand and determined face, the girl was standing in front of the cave, her six shooters levelled at the outlaw's head.

"Now, don't get excited, Red," she exclaimed, quietly.

"I'm running this show for a few minutes. That scout's escape is a warning. His life wasn't saved for nothing. If you do anything to him now, bad luck will follow you."

"Pedro, fetch him to the cave!"

The calmness and presence of mind of the girl, as she faced the desperate outlaw, won the admiration of the scouts, while her reference to the supernatural struck the one vulnerable spot in Red's make-up.

And, as the fiend who laughed at physical danger, struggled to overcome his superstition, the others watched him breathlessly.

Upon the phlegmatic Pedro alone did the dramatic scene fail to have effect.

Glancing from girl to outlaw, he shifted uneasily.

"Shall I fetch him?" he finally demanded of his chief.

Breathlessly the others awaited Red's reply.

But, ere he could speak, there rang out a sharp "ping"—and a bullet flattened itself against the cliff above Rosie's head.

"Where's that from?" roared the desperado, wheeling.

One glance from the edge of the plateau answered him.

Seeming no bigger than ants, a file of men wound in and out among the rocks far below.

"It's the troopers! Quick, saddle up!" commanded the bandit. "They're shooting at such an angle they can't hit us here. But this is no place to stand a siege."

"It'll be hot work reaching the Old Stockade, now!"

In the face of this unexpected danger, the stress of the past few moments was forgotten.

Quickly Rose dashed into the cave, returning with a canvas bag and some blankets, while Red and Pedro hurriedly caught the stolen army horses, thrust bridles, rudely improvised the night before from pieces of rawhide, into their mouths, and then, with other pieces of thong, laced the blankets brought out by the girl upon their backs.

"How about the scouts? Shall we leave 'em?" inquired Pedro.

"Not much!" returned the outlaw, once more the calculating bandit whole resourcefulness was his greatest strength. "The troopers will be sure to come here, and if they find our prisoners, there'll be just three more against us."

"But we can put them out of the way," suggested the girl, her former compassion vanished.

"Sure, whenever we want. Just now, we need 'em. We'll each put one behind us. They'll serve as a bullet shield."

By this time the patter of the bullets against the wall of rock had become a veritable hailstorm and the wisdom of the bandit's plan was evident for, once on the trail, there was no telling when some trooper might get the exact range.

The work of placing their prisoners upon the ponies and binding their legs tight, beneath the animals' bellies was the work of only a few minutes.

In order to get the greatest service from the horses, Red had placed the two lightest of the band, Rose and Scotty, upon the smallest horse, assigning Pedro and Shaw to the next smallest, and reserving the most powerful, which was none other than Jennings' own Bonehead, for himself and his human shield.

"We'll ride from the plateau one at a time," instructed the outlaw, when all was ready. "The troopers don't know how strong we are, and when they see one after another dash out, we'll gain time, because they'll wait to find if there are more."

"Ride close to the cliff and at a run. Turn to the right at the end of the plateau and go down the mountain. Rosie, you go first. I'll follow. Bend low. Now!"

Rapidly the desperado had uttered his instructions, and as he gave the word, the girl leaped her horse forward and, at what seemed foolhardy speed to the scout at her back, gained the edge of the shelf of rock, then dashed down the trail, which quickly carried them into the protection of the woods.

Taken by surprise, the troopers had sent not one bullet at the girl. But, when Red Rogers and Jennings appeared in the open, as they raced for the shelter of the trees, shells whistled and spat as they sped over their heads or flattened themselves against the rocks below.

"Swing your man round to your side, Pedro. They'll have the range on you," shouted his chief, drawing rein to wait for his pal.

Unfortunate for Shaw proved the warning.

Quickly obeying his master, Pedro jerked the scout to his side, then clapped spurs to his mount.

As the horse gained the trail, there was a volley of shells, one of which caught Shaw in the shoulder and another ploughed through his breeches, just escaping his thigh.

"Lucky there are no more of us," grinned the outlaw, as he hurriedly bound up Shaw's wound. "Even I shouldn't care about crossing that clearing again. You men at Fort Griswold shoot well, I'll say that much. But when you're on patrol, you act like kids."

This allusion to the ease with which he had first stolen their horses and then captured them grated deeply upon the two veteran scouts.

"Wait till this fun is over. You'll sing a different tune," flashed Jennings, unable to restrain himself longer.

"Think so, eh?" grinned Red Rogers. "Say, I'd make a bet with you if I wasn't opposed to taking money from a child."

"Just to show you I'm right, my doubling on my tracks will give me at least six hours' leeway."

"Your troopers will think I've ridden up the mountain and before they learn their mistake, it will be dark."

CHAPTER VI.

ONE HUNDRED AGAINST ONE.

Chuckling as he saw the angry flushes his taunts brought to the faces of his prisoners, the desperado wheeled his mount and once more resumed his way.

Not far had he ridden, however, when he met Rose, who, alarmed at the whistling and patter of the shells, had started back to learn if her pals had been injured.

"Any wounds?" she asked, surveying Red and Pedro, anxiously.

"Narry a scratch. Pedro's shield stopped a couple of pills, though. But they didn't hit him in the vitals."

"I'll take the lead, now. Keep your eyes and ears open, but don't shoot unless I give the word."

And with Red in the van and Pedro bringing up the rear, the outlaws resumed their ride down the mountain-side.

And, while they descended, the troopers were swarming up the trail, just as the notorious outlaw had anticipated, eager to close in upon the fugitives.

When word had been received at the Fort, thirty hours before, that Red Rogers had literally shot his way to freedom, leaving three corpses besides that of the telegraph operator to mark his departure, the excitement had been intense.

Summoning his officers, the colonel had bidden them each to take an hundred men and, riding in the form of a half moon, to scour every nook and cranny of the foothills, keeping in touch with one another during the day by heliograph signals and at night by rockets.

Quickly the orders had been given and as the troopers assembled, Colonel Edwards had addressed them.

"Remember, you have no rum-crazed Indian to deal with," he said. "The man you are after is not only an expert in woodcraft and familiar with every section of the 'Bad Lands,' but one who knows no fear and brings down his men when he shoots.

"The Governor has offered ten thousand dollars reward for Red Rogers alive. The sheriff and the United States marshal, with their deputies, are leading posses in pursuit.

"I want the honor of the capture to come to Fort Griswold. As an incentive, I promise that the reward shall be divided equally among the men who catch Red Rogers.

"*Don't come back without him!* Captain Smythe, you may start now."

And as the command had rung out, columns of cavalry had galloped from the post.

During the forenoon of the previous day, runners had informed each column that the outlaw had been assisted in his escape by Rose Landon, his sweetheart, and Pedro, a former member of his gang of cut-throats, and that the trio had headed straight north from Keno.

Believing that the escaped desperado was striving with all speed possible to reach the border and cross into Canada, the colonel had ordered three of the columns to ride by forced marches to the boundary and then to form a cordon; three other columns had been instructed to enter the foothills at the "Death Trail" and beat the forests as they worked North, while the seventh, as a precautionary measure, had been detailed to start the man hunt at the Southern end of the "Bad Lands."

As the outlaw's destination was the Old Stockade, which was in the Southern portion of the mountains, it was this seventh column, whose men and officers had cursed their luck at being kept from the Northern dash, that had so unexpectedly sighted the quarry.

The officer in command was Lieutenant Harry Fox, and with him at the head of the troops rode a half-breed scout whom the soldiers had dubbed Alkali, because of his insatiable thirst.

"Funny we ain't seen nothing of Jennings' patrol," the scout was saying, when suddenly his keen eyes discerned the "broken staff" signal.

Quickly communicating his discovery to his superiors, the two men spurred their horses forward and soon were in possession of Shaw's note.

"Well, if that ain't just Red's luck," growled Alkali, as the lieutenant read the message aloud.

"It strikes me it's our luck. What do you mean?" demanded Fox.

"I mean six hundred troopers and goodness knows how many posses are hunting for Red to the North and here he is to the South with only a hundred—and them the boniest heads in the bunch—to dodge."

The lieutenant was young, and this contemptuous allusion to the scouting ability of his command and the half-breed's assurance that the outlaw would elude them, angered him.

"Well, if my hundred men can't run one outlaw to cover, especially when our three mounted scouts are trailing him, I'll shoot the whole blooming lot!" he retorted, hotly.

"Keerful! Steady in the ranks! Don't go to making no rash promises!" cautioned Alkali. "Remember, you ain't been up against Red before."

"By the time you're through with him, you're liable to know you've been on a real manhunt."

"That may be. But, I'm not going to begin by whining because I haven't a man for every rock and tree," rejoined the young officer. "If Red Rogers is such a tricky customer, here's the chance for you to show some of your cleverness, Alkali—and win fame and money into the bargain."

Before the lieutenant had ceased speaking, several of the troopers had come up and as they heard their superior's sarcastic words, they grinned appreciatively, for the half-breed was not popular, and was always boasting of his prowess on the trail.

With the arrival of his men, Fox became every inch the officer.

"Sergeant, tell the signal man to flash his heliograph and say we've located Rogers," he commanded. "Alkali, pick up Jennings' trail."

And as the men obeyed, he drew forth his field glasses and swept the mountainside.

Stung by the lieutenant's taunts and the troopers' glee, the half-breed employed his woodcraft to the best of his ability, and in less than ten minutes returned to the boulder, announcing that he had found the trail.

Surprised, but delighted at such quick work, the young officer gave the command to advance and the troopers, elated to think that they had a chance at the prize money after all, took up the trail eagerly.

But the going was rough and the trail tortuous.

At the end of three hours' toilsome climbing, the troopers were rewarded by a shout from Alkali, who was pointing excitedly to the plateau where the outlaw had come so near death at the hands of the brave scout.

Quickly the lieutenant focussed his glasses upon the shelf of rock.

"It's horses! Yes, cavalry horses!" he exclaimed, excitedly.

"Boys, give 'em a few shots. We may be able to scare 'em out."

And how well the troopers succeeded, the reader already knows.

As the outlaw had anticipated, Rose's dash had taken the cavalymen by surprise, but they were prepared for Red and Pedro when they appeared.

After the girl's escape, the lieutenant had trained his field glasses on the trail.

"It's Red, all right! It must be from his shirt! He's got some one behind him. A hundred dollars to the man who drops him!" cried Fox, excitedly, as the outlaw raced along the trail.

After Pedro had passed, the troopers waited several minutes.

"There's no more of 'em," opined Alkali. "We're only losing time here. Better strike for them woods, sir."

But the young officer was of a different mind.

"That's just what Red would expect us to do," returned the lieutenant. "Up the trail, men."

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUARREL.

Peering constantly to the left, right and ahead of him, the cunning outlaw descended the trail, now raising his

hand for his companions to halt while he rode ahead to reconnoiter, now beckoning to them to ride faster.

His calmness, woodcraft and absolute fearlessness could not but rouse the admiration of the scout who was made his unwilling companion, yet as each minute passed without any sound indicating the approach of the troopers, thereby corroborating Red's statement that the cavalymen would never think of his doubling on his tracks, Jennings could barely restrain his anger and disappointment.

And that the same thoughts were in the mind of his veteran comrade was soon made apparent.

As the trail swung toward the edge of the woods nearest the troopers, Shaw turned his head.

"Help!" he started to bellow.

But the alarm that might have ended the notorious outlaw's career then and there never rang out.

As the first sound came from the scout's lips, Pedro whirled with lightning rapidity and, seizing his prisoner by the throat, stifled the cry by choking him until his tongue protruded from his mouth.

Ignorant of what had been their comrade's purpose, Jennings and Scotty turned their heads to learn the cause of the commotion—and this act lost to them the precious opportunity to attract the attention of the troopers.

Seemingly divining what had occurred, even as the scouts turned their heads, Red and Rose jammed kerchiefs into their mouths and in a trice they were effectually gagged, after which, the girl repeated the operation upon Shaw.

"Say, you dubs want to remember it's Red Rogers who has captured you—not some fool trooper or Mounted Scout," jeered the outlaw. "Slicker men than you have tried to trick me—and failed. But, don't try my patience too often. Much as I enjoy your company, you may force me to part with it."

And, with this statement, so sinister in its significance, the desperado resumed the descent of the trail.

When Pedro's powerful hand had choked off Shaw's attempt to hail his comrades from the Fort, he had expected death would be the penalty for his failure. Accordingly, when he found that the only consequence was the increased discomfiture to himself and fellows occasioned by the gags, he fell to wondering more than ever as to the use Red Rogers intended to make of them.

But he was soon to learn.

Instead of following a straight course to the foot of

the mountain, the outlaw zigzagged back and forth, sending his horse across stretches of rock, whenever they cropped from the earth, that his trail might suddenly stop, causing the manhunters following it delay and difficulty in picking it up again.

At last, however, just as twilight came upon the land, the cavalcade rode out upon the level at the base of the foothills.

But, to the amazement of the scouts, they were in a region of the "Bad Lands" never before seen by them.

For several minutes the notorious desperado watched the expressions on the faces of his prisoners as they vainly sought some familiar landmark that would give them an inkling as to their whereabouts.

"If I had time, I'd make a map of these hills and send it to the commandant at Griswold," he chuckled. "It's beyond reason to expect a Mounted Scout or any other soldier to catch a man in a country he don't know anything about."

"But you'd be more surprised than you are now if you knew how close to Griswold you were. I could get there and back in ten hours."

"Careful, Red," cautioned Rose. "Don't boast."

"Did you ever hear me say anything I didn't make good?" demanded the outlaw, turning fiercely upon the girl.

"No-o—not exactly. I've never known you to fall down yet."

"You mean I haven't carried out my pledge to your father?" queried Rogers, irritated by the emphasis Rose placed on the word "yet."

"Uhuh."

This answer aroused the bandit's anger, sending hot flushes to his cheeks.

"That ain't fair, Rose, and you know it. I'd never been caught if I hadn't stopped to place your father where the manhunters could not find him to claim the five thousand reward, dead or alive. Here I've set the whole state by the ears by getting out of jail at Keno so's I could keep my pledge to your daddy—and there ain't been a day during the five years I was behind the bars, I ain't watched my chance—and now you accuse me of laying down. 'Tain't fair, Rosie, 'tain't fair."

Eagerly the scouts drank in the bits of intimate history disclosed by Red's passionate outburst, hoping against hope that he would let fall more of his life's secrets.

But the girl's actions prevented.

Placing her hand soothingly on the outlaw's arm, she looked into his face.

"Don't talk that way, Red," she breathed.

"I had no right to say what I did. 'Course, you've had no chance to keep your pledge. I know that. I didn't mean it the way you took it. Why, you're the only friend I've got left in the world. How do you suppose I'd lived if you hadn't sent Pedro with that bag of gold to me the night they—the night daddy was killed?"

"Please don't be angry with me, Red."

The pleading tone and soulful eyes with which the girl sought forgiveness appeased the huge desperado's wrath.

"Guess I couldn't if I wanted to," he returned, the tone in which he uttered the words sounding silly from such a man.

But, as he spoke, he reached out an arm, and lowered his bearded face, with the evident intention of drawing Rose to him and kissing her.

With a movement of well-feigned embarrassment, the girl avoided him, and so grotesque was the expression that spread over Red's face at the failure of his uncouth attempt at lovemaking that the scouts grinned.

Unluckily for them, the outlaw saw their mirth.

"You would mock me, would you?" he thundered. "I'll teach you to laugh at Red Rogers!"

And drawing back his fist, he drove it full into the helpless Jennings' face, causing the blood to spurt from his nose.

Abashed by this act of wanton cruelty in striking a man bound hand and foot, the others cowered.

Chuckling at the evident pain he had caused the scout, the desperado snatched the canvas bag from where Rose had been carrying it in front of her, drew forth a flask, and took a long pull at it.

Cursing horribly, the bandit shook the flask at his prisoners.

"If I can't have love, I can have whiskey and blood—and I'll have 'em!" he hissed.

Rose's repulse had transformed the outlaw from a good-natured giant to a fiend incarnate—and none of the awed group seemed to realize it more fully than the girl herself.

"Oh, Red, don't talk like that. I'll kiss you, if you want me to. I—I only didn't like to have all these men see me," she exclaimed, suddenly determined to sacrifice herself for the safety of the people in the region upon which this terrible bandit had been loosed.

"Too late!" chuckled Rogers, taking another pull at his flask. "I'll keep you by me till I've fulfilled my pledge to old Barney—and then you must shift for yourself. Not a sou will Red Rogers give nor a finger will he lift again to help Barney Landon's daughter!"

Horrible to behold was the desperado as he uttered these words and gloatingly he noticed the shock they caused his hearers.

Cursing his helplessness, Scotty longed to avenge the insult, or to let the girl know he would protect her—for the scout was young and Rose was of a wild beauty which had captivated the boy's heart the moment he had seen her—but he was forced to content himself with an attempt to convey his meaning by pressing against her.

Yet the girl seemed to understand, and, turning her head, smiled gratefully at her prisoner.

Fortunately for the two, the outlaw was too absorbed in his thoughts to notice them. Indeed, so engrossed was he that it was obvious to all he was planning some deviltry.

Suddenly his face broke into a hideous smile.

"Pedro, get off that horse!" he commanded. "Put your scout on the one the girl's riding. Tie him fast, so he can't get loose. Then take the man from behind me and put him, together with the kid, on your horse. I'll take the girl with me."

To the others, it seemed nothing could have been more significant of the change that had come over the desperado than his refusal to call Rose by her name.

Yet Red's next words gave evidence that there was.

"Better give her guns and knives to me before you begin transferring the scouts, Pedro," he commanded.

"Am I a prisoner?" demanded the girl, her voice defiant, though in her heart she was deeply alarmed.

"Not yet!" returned the outlaw, grinning as he made use of the very words of Rose—words which had caused his metamorphosis. "It depends on how you behave. Get a move on, Pedro, it will soon be dark."

As his pal, too familiar with his chief's moods to dally, stepped toward the girl, she determined upon a last appeal.

"Shame on you, Red Rogers, to order her weapons to be taken from your old pal Barney Landon's daughter!" she flashed.

"And shame on you for refusing a kiss to the only friend you or old Barney Landon ever had," mocked the outlaw.

"I didn't refuse. I was embarrassed. Of course, you can have one or twenty, Red."

Into her words and the expression on her face, Rose put all her persuasiveness.

Breathlessly the others watched the effect upon the outlaw of her apparent surrender.

A moment Red scanned her face searchingly.

"Go ahead, Pedro," he growled.

And, turning his back, he took another pull at his flask.

CHAPTER VIII.

RED ROGERS SENDS A MESSAGE TO THE FORT.

In tense silence, Rose watched the bandit approach to carry out his master's orders.

An instant the girl thought of defying both the notorious outlaw who had spurned her and his minion. A slash of her bowie-knife would sever the bonds of the scout at her back and then she could cover both Red and Pedro with her six shooters.

The thought of having the desperado in her power and the pleasure it would be to humble him by forcing an apology from his lips proved irresistible, and stealthily she dropped her hands to the pistol butts.

Pedro, however, was watching her intently, and as he saw the movement, leaped upon her, catching her wrists in his powerful hands.

"No you don't, my lady!" he hissed. "Hey, Red, this she-devil was going to shoot you."

"I'm not surprised. The Landon's never were strong on gratitude," returned the bandit. "Hurry and take away her shooting irons so she won't have another chance, and then transfer the prisoners as I told you."

These words were spoken by Rogers without taking the trouble even to turn his head, and his utter indifference to her contemplated act of treachery effected Rose as nothing else could have done.

"Oh, Red, forgive me! Forgive me!" she sobbed. "I didn't mean to quarrel with you." The excitement of your breaking out of jail and our escape from the troopers have been too much for my nerves. I know you were a friend to daddy—and you've been to me. Please for——"

"Bah! Cut it out," interrupted the outlaw, savagely. "You've showed your real nature. It's lucky for me you

did. Now that I know you, I can make my plans accordingly."

Even the scouts were amazed at the bitterness of this reply, and they awaited with many misgivings the next move of their strange captor.

That he was doing something, they could all see from the motion of his right arm, but not until it suited his pleasure did they learn what it was.

"Are the men ready, Pedro?" he inquired at last.

"Uhuh!"

"Good. Keep a close watch on the girl and the young and the old prisoners. I'll be back in a little while. Remember, I hold you responsible for the girl and the others. If you try any tricks or leave this spot, I'll hunt you down—if I have to follow you into the jail at Keno!"

These words showed plainly the desperateness of Rogers' mood, and the others followed his every move with apprehension.

Suddenly reining his pony alongside of Shaw, he unwound the sash about his own waist and bound it about the scout's head, blindfolding him.

This done, he seized the horse by the bridle and started to lead it down the canyon.

"Remember, your lives will pay the forfeit if I do not find you all here when I return," he snapped, in warning.

Believing that his end had come, Shaw listened for the slightest sound that might give an inkling as to the fate in store for him. But only the tramp of his horse could he hear.

For minutes that seemed interminable, his suspense continued. Now he thought he caught the sound of rushing water, and feared he was about to plunge into some swirling stream, then, as the sound died away, he told himself that his captor was probably leading him toward some precipice from which he would fall to a horrible death. The uncertainty was maddening. It seemed to him that his head would burst and in his mental agony he writhed and squirmed.

But at last his suffering came to an end.

"I'm going to send you with a message to the Fort," exclaimed Rogers, suddenly, as he stopped the horse. "That is, I'm going to start you with a message. Whether you live to deliver it is another matter," he added, grimly. "However, if anything happens to you, the message will be probably found, because within three hours you ought to be on a well traveled trail."

In amazement, the scout listened to his words, then

felt something being thrust under the cords that bound his arms.

As this motion ceased, there ensued an absolute silence; then a resounding slap rang out and Shaw felt his mount leap forward—whither, he did not know.

And as his horse dashed ahead, Rogers' mocking laugh rang in his ears.

Diabolical, indeed, was the plan the terrible outlaw had adopted.

Absolutely helpless, even his powers of speech and sight cut off by a gag and bandage, and bound fast to a horse, the scout was sent at a gallop into the night. Should the animal stumble, he might be crushed to death. Unfamiliar with the trail, in the darkness the horse might step off a precipice or, should the animal take it into his head, he might wander among the foothills, browsing in the sweet grass while the man on his back, tortured by flies and mosquitoes, slowly went crazy from thirst and hunger.

Little, however, did Rogers reck what fate overtook the scout, though he hoped the horse would return to the Fort, finding his way by instinct, well knowing that the sight of the soldier, bound and wounded, would rouse the colonel to fury, while his crude note was intended to strike terror by its threats.

But not long did the outlaw have to gloat over his deviltry.

As he stood listening to the hoofbeats of the army horse grow fainter and fainter, his eyes wandered over the dim outlines of the mountains surrounding him.

Suddenly he saw a ball of flame shoot into the air from the hill directly ahead of him, followed almost immediately by other balls from right and left.

"Rocket signals!" exclaimed Rogers. "By the blood of old Barney! it won't do for me to delay getting to the Stockade. Judging from their rockets, the manhunters must be closing in on it. If I'm going to reach there at all, it must be to-night. I can never get through in the daytime."

Rose and the others also beheld the signals, and in the face of the danger all the girl's anger against the outlaw vanished.

"Oh, Red! Did you see those rockets?" she inquired, with her old time interest in his welfare, as he rejoined his anxious companions.

"Sure I saw 'em," he replied. "Couldn't very well help it—unless I was blindfolded, like the scout."

At the mention of the luckless man he had led away, the girl drew her breath sharply.

"What did you do to him?" she demanded.

"It's none of your business, but I don't mind telling you," responded Rogers, his anger at Rose apparently forgotten. "I sent him with a message to the Fort."

"But he'll never get there!" protested the girl.

"Why not?"

"The horse doesn't know the way."

"Never you worry. An army horse will always find his way back to his post—provided nothing happens to him."

"But, if he doesn't go quickly, the man may die!" gasped Rose, in horror.

"So much the better. It'll give more force to my terms."

At this announcement that the desperado had not only sent a message to the Fort, but had dictated conditions, the others were amazed.

"What in the world did you say?" queried the girl, voicing the curiosity of the rest.

"Not much."

"But what?"

"Say, you're asking a good many questions, did you know it?" demanded Rogers.

His tone, however, indicated that he was not displeased and so Rose persisted.

"How can I help it since you won't tell without my asking?" she returned.

"If you ain't just like old Barney," mused the bandit, smiling at the girl good naturedly. "I've seen Barney ready to shoot a man down, then something would excite his curiosity, and he'd forget what he was holding his guns for. Many a time he——"

"Never mind about daddy. What did you say in your message?" interrupted Rose, impatiently.

"But it was about your daddy."

"About daddy? Oh, Red, tell me." Then a shrewd thought flashed into her mind and she added: "You're wasting valuable time teasing me."

The words produced the desired effect upon the bandit, recalling him, as they did, to the danger of his position.

"I guess it would be better for me if we stayed mad," he rejoined. "I forget everything when I'm talking to you, Rosie."

"Then I won't say another word to you, *ever*, unless you tell me what message you sent to the Fort," pouted

the girl, aware that the breach between them had been healed.

"Oh, it was nothing much. I just told the colonel I'd come back to keep the pledge I made to Barney the night he was killed, adding that I had two more of his men beside the messenger, I was keeping so's he'd behave. Oh, yes, and I told him if he didn't get a safe conduct for you and leave it at old man Quint's before to-day week, I'd run down and burn up his old Fort."

In contemplation of the effect such a message from the man for whom his troops were scouring the "Bad Lands" would have upon their choleric colonel, the scouts forgot the precariousness of their position.

"But old turkey gobbler won't do it," exclaimed Rose, with the evident wish of being contradicted.

"No-o. I don't suppose he will," admitted the outlaw, reluctantly. "But it will give me a chance to make 'em sit-up and take notice. It'll show 'em they've got some job on their hands to catch me when I can run through their lines, call at old man Quint's and get back again."

"Nobody with any sense would try it," grunted Pedro. "What would become of Rosie and me if you got caught? You ought to think of others besides yourself when you're planning these daredevil raids."

"That's just what I am doing," retorted Rogers. "Didn't I tell you I asked the colonel for a safe conduct for Rosie? If I can only get it, she can go to Old Mex. and you can go where you please."

"And where'll you go?" demanded Pedro, suspiciously.

"I? Oh, I'll just carry out my pledge and then travel for my health."

The matter-of-fact manner in which the outlaw, who was, even as he spoke, being hunted by hundreds of men, talked of eluding his pursuers and fulfilling his promise, gave the scouts an idea of his absolute fearlessness which they could not but admire, while at the same time his contempt for the Service galled them.

The girl, however, received Red's words in silence.

"What is the pledge you made to daddy?" she suddenly demanded.

"Something that doesn't concern you, Rosie."

"But it *does*. I don't see why you should run such risks of being captured, now you're safe, just on account of a promise. Please tell me what it is. I'm Barney's daughter, and as such—if it seems foolish—I can absolve you from your pledge."

Though they had known that the outlaw had made

some sort of promise to his pal as he lay dying in his arms, neither Rose nor Pedro were aware of its exact nature. Moreover, the constant reference to it since their capture had whetted the curiosity of the scouts.

Consequently it was with keenest eagerness the four listened for the bandit's answer.

"It's generous of you, Rosie, very," he finally declared. "But Red Rogers never broke a promise yet!"

And with these words, the outlaw mounted his horse and, followed by Pedro with the prisoners, set out for the Old Stockade.

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE RUSE.

Despite the fact that the man who spoke these words was a villain of the deepest die, wantonly cruel, who had not hesitated to take the life of man or woman when his doing so meant the saving of his own, there was an impressiveness about his refusal to forswear his promise to his dead pal. And, respecting his attitude, regardless of how perverted it was, the girl made no further attempt to dissuade him from his purpose.

Indeed, no opportunity could she have found even had she desired to make the attempt.

As the horses bore them up the trail, the outlaws and their prisoners were able to obtain a better view of the surrounding hills and what they beheld amazed them.

The rocks seemed alive with scores of bobbing lights, giving to the mountains, huge in their outlines, the appearance of strange monsters with innumerable glowing eyes.

In silence, Rogers contemplated the spectacle.

And as he watched, there suddenly leaped into the air a great semi-circular wall of flame.

"By the blood of old Barney! there'll be hot work to-night," snarled the outlaw. "I'd calculated the man-hunters would go into camp for the night and instead they're searching with fire and torches!"

If the activity of the troopers alarmed Rogers and his pals, it raised the spirits of the scouts to the highest pitch of exultation and excitement.

Just where the Old Stockade was located, neither Jennings nor Scotty knew, but so enormous was the semi-

circle of flame they believed it would be impossible for Rogers to reach it and his next move made their belief certainty.

"You all stay here," he exclaimed. "I'm going to reconnoiter."

"Please don't, Red," pleaded the girl.

"But I must, Rosie. If it's a possible thing, we must get through to the Stockade, and the flare from those fires is so deceptive, I can't tell whether or not the trail is blocked unless I get close."

And without giving the girl the opportunity to make further protest, the outlaw disappeared in the darkness.

Yet scarcely did it seem to the anxious group that he had gone than he was back.

"Quick! Blindfold the prisoners!" he commanded. "We can't get to the Old Stockade. The fire wall runs clear round the loop, and when I turned 'Look out' rock, a score of lights were just starting up the very mountain we're on."

"Where are you going, back?" queried Rose, the only indication of the desperateness of their situation being in the tenseness of her voice.

"Don't talk direction," warned Rogers. "We're going to the 'Breathing Cave.' It's our only chance—and it's going to be lively work. Dismount and walk, Pedro. We can make better time and help the horses more."

Instantly the outlaw's commands were obeyed, and the dash for the "Breathing Cave" and temporary safety, at least, was begun.

Maddened to think they were powerless to disclose the whereabouts of Red Rogers, the scouts racked their brains for some expedient by which they could manage to retard the fugitives. But in vain. And to their helplessness was added the inability even to see how close their comrades were.

When the heliograph signal had been received at the Fort and by the three center columns that Lieutenant Fox and his men had not only picked up the outlaw's trail, but had actually got near enough to shoot at him, there was great excitement and jubilation among the troopers in the saddle and the men left at the Post.

What the colonel and civil authorities had feared it might take weeks, perhaps months, to do had been accomplished in less than forty-eight hours, and their joy was corresponding.

Instantly word was telegraphed to deputy marshals and sheriffs as to the general whereabouts of the fugitives,

and they were urged to press into service every man who could carry a gun and ride to the foothills without mercy to their horses.

Assurances received that the request would be obeyed, the colonel ordered four hundred of the five hundred troopers left at the Fort to race to the scene, and he himself rode at their head.

Thoroughly aware of their quarry's resourcefulness, the colonel had struck upon the scheme of throwing out the great semi-circle of fire as an effective stop to the fugitives getting through to the North or West. The East needed no protection, for it was self-evident that the outlaw would not come out on the plains where capture was certain. Only the South—the direction from which the civil posses would come—would be left dark, for the reason that there were none among them who could read the heliograph signals. But the colonel hoped they would see the fires of his troopers and divining their purpose complete the circle.

Fox's men, by reason of their being on the scene, were ordered to the West, together with such of the middle columns as could be got there in time, while the men from the Fort were to take the Northern position.

Sparing neither themselves nor their mounts, the troopers rode, and the exchange of rockets Rogers had seen were the announcements that the men were in position, followed in due course by the signal to touch off the wall of fire.

To Rogers and the girl, it seemed as though the torch-bearing troopers must have wings, so rapidly did they advance, and the voices of the manhunters approaching from the direction of "Look Out" rock soon became audible, as they shouted encouragement to one another.

The course followed by the outlaw and his companions was almost due Southwest.

"Can we make it?" breathed Rose, as the shouts became more and more distinct.

"We've got to make it," returned Rogers.

"Don't talk that way. Tell me the truth," pleaded the girl.

"Fifteen minutes will tell the tale, Rosie. Keep your eye on Pedro. Don't let him lag."

In an agony of suspense, the girl kept her head turned toward the manhunters while she maintained a whispered outpouring of encouragement and exhortation at the bandit who was leading the prisoners.

Nearer and nearer, the fugitives approached the haven selected by the notorious outlaw.

"I reckon we're safe, Rosie," breathed Rogers, at last. "We have less than a hundred yards to go."

"Glory be!" returned the girl.

But their rejoicing was premature!

Barely had the words left the outlaw's lips than his keen eyes discerned the form of a man skulking ahead of them.

Suppressing an oath, Rogers bade Rose halt and dismount. Then, crouching low, he glided with wonderful swiftness upon the moving figure.

As he drew himself together for the leap that would bring him upon the man, Red's foot crunched a pebble.

Apprised by the sound that there was some one near at hand, for the outlaw had managed to hide his advance in the shadow of the brush and rocks lining the trail, the man stopped.

"Who goes there? Friend or foe?" he gasped.

"Friend," returned the outlaw, advancing boldly.

Relieved at the thought he had run across a fellow manhunter, the other exclaimed:

"I'm glad you're here. I've heard hoofbeats coming up this trail for several minutes. I don't believe any one else but Red and me knows of the 'Breathing Cave,' so I suppose it's him. By standing one on each side of the trail, we ought to get both him and Pedro.

"We'll shoot Pedro. But we won't get the ten thousand reward unless we get Red alive. I asked Sheriff Black to-day. When I found that out and heard where Red had been located and the plans the soldiers were making which would cut off his going to the Old Stockade, I hit the trail for the Cave. I'm——"

But the fellow never finished his sentence.

With a shocking oath, the terrible outlaw seized him by the throat and shook him as a terrier does a rat.

"You would betray me for a reward, would you, Faro Pete?" he hissed.

An instant Rogers waited until the shudder which ran through his captive's body told him the fellow had recognized him. Then he raised his pistol butt and crashed it down with terrific force upon his would-be betrayer's head.

Precious time had been lost, however, in listening to Faro Pete—time that Red spared only because he wished to learn all he could as to the manhunters' plans and the reward. As soon as he had acquired this information, he had ended his former pal's life, and dropping the body beside the trail, the outlaw hastened back to his companions.

"There's some one over there to the North of us, I think," breathed Pedro, when his master rejoined him.

Pressed on all sides, Rogers and his comrades were, indeed, in desperate straits. One false move and their fate would be sealed.

A moment, the outlaw pondered.

"Quick, Rosie! Take this knife and cut the thongs binding the scouts to the horses. Pedro, grab the smaller one. Choke him so he'll be quiet. When I give the word, dash with him for the Cave. I'll tote the other.

"Rosie, when I say *now*, turn the horses and send them down the trail on the run!"

These directions were uttered with as little noise as possible. Yet they were overheard.

"Here they are! Here they are!" "Close in on 'em!" yelled four or five voices from the direction Pedro had said he heard suspicious sounds.

Under the crackling of the bushes and the crunching of stones as the manhunters advanced, Rogers whispered:

"Now!"

Frantically Rose jabbed the horses with the knife the outlaw had given her.

Snorting with pain and fright, the animals dashed down the trail, the beat of their iron shoes upon the rocks ringing out loud and clear.

"Watch out!"

"Down the trail!"

"They're mounted!"

"Shoot 'em!"

"Don't let 'em escape!"

In a babel of voices, these warnings and commands were roared.

"Crouch down!" breathed Rogers. "If they shoot, we'll dash for the Cave. If they don't, we'll—"

Bang! crashed a volley. Then another and another.

With all speed possible, the troopers rushed up the mountainside while, as the reports rang out and reverberated among the mountains, wild were the wavings of torches by the manhunters too far away to join in the pursuit.

And under cover of the confusion, Red Rogers and his comrades gained the entrance to the "Breathing Cave."

the mountain that the animals were quickly stopped in their mad run.

"Close in! Be careful, Red is a dead shot!" yelled the manhunters as they leaped and scrambled over the rocks, hurrying to gain the spot where the horses had dropped before the fugitives, whom they supposed to have been riding the animals, could have the chance to seek cover in the underbrush.

The flare of the torches made the mountainside almost as light as day.

In the excitement, the manhunters poured volleys of lead at everything that moved, determined not to let the outlaw escape again.

But as the foremost of the pursuers gained the side of the disabled horses, they knew that they had been outwitted by the resourceful Rogers.

"He's fooled us!" yelled a trooper.

"What makes you think so?" demanded Lieutenant Fox, who was the first officer to reach the scene.

"Because the horses and their blankets are riddled with bullets," replied one of his men. "No person could have been on their backs and have lived."

"Then where is Rogers?" returned the young officer.

"The old Nick only knows," grunted a veteran. "One thing's certain, though." And then the trooper grew silent, as if repenting of his words.

"What is certain? Why don't you speak, man, instead of standing there like a dummy?" flashed Fox.

"I didn't want to seem to be meddling, sir," rejoined the trooper. "But I was going to say that Red can't be far away or he wouldn't have resorted to the ruse of turning his horses loose."

"Then get busy and find him. Don't waste precious time standing round here," snapped the lieutenant. And at his words, the group about the fallen horses melted away and disappeared among the rocks and underbrush, the men's course being indicated by the glow from their torches.

A moment the young officer stood, debating whether he should go with his men or report to the colonel, and before he had made up his mind, the members of the sheriff's posse who had caused the outlaw to abandon his horses, came upon him.

"Who are you?" demanded the lieutenant.

"We came with Sheriff Black," replied one of them.

"Well, get into the brush. Don't dally round here. Rogers has tricked us."

"Ain't that just like him?" exclaimed another member

CHAPTER X.

BESIEGED.

So deadly had been the aim of the troopers as they poured their volleys of lead at the horses dashing down

of the posse. "I told Black, while we were waiting up the trail yonder, that I'd bet Red would get away, and now he's done it. One or a thousand men, it don't make no difference to him. If he has any chance at all, he can wriggle through them. Now I——"

But the young officer, reminded by the fellow's words of the manner in which the outlaw had eluded him during the day, turned on his heel and was walking away, when a shout sounded from ahead.

"This way! This way!" yelled a voice. "Red's gone this way! Here's the body of a man he's killed!"

Instantly the troopers, who had been scouring the mountainside surrounding the horses gave up their efforts and hastened up the trail.

"That's Faro Pete," announced Sheriff Black, after an examination of the body. "I'd rather have lost a dozen other men than him."

"Why?" demanded Captain Smythe, forcing his way through the group about the man whom the outlaw had killed.

"Because, as a member of Red's old gang, he knew all his haunts. When he heard where the cuss had been located, he 'lowed that Red would probably make for the Old Stockade, and if he found the trails cut off, for the 'Breathing Cave.' Pete was the only man, so far as I know, who was ever with Red in the Cave. And now he's gone and we're likely to be gray headed before we can find out how to get into it."

"Breathing Cave? Breathing Cave?" repeated the captain. "What in the world are you talking about, man? Who ever heard of a Breathing Cave?"

"I have, sir," replied a voice.

In surprise, the officers and sheriff turned toward the speaker and beheld Alkali.

"Then tell us what it is and where it is," commanded Smythe.

"It's a crack in a rock, barely large enough for a man to squeeze into, and when you stand beside it, you can feel it breathe."

"Feel a rock breathe," sneered Lieutenant Fox, contemptuously. "Have you been drinking, Alkali?"

"No, sir. What I'm telling you about that Cave is the truth. And I can prove it."

"How?" demanded Smythe.

"By taking you to it."

"You know where it is?" exclaimed the sheriff and the officers, in pleased surprise.

"Sure I do. You ain't more than three rods from it this very minute."

"Then take us to it," ordered the captain. "Beyond a doubt, that's where the man we're after is hiding. Fox, go down and report to the colonel all we have learned. You might suggest that it would be well for him to come up here. He'll probably wish to take charge of the prisoner."

With no attempt to conceal his disappointment and displeasure at being sent by his superior to carry a message to the colonel that might just as well have been entrusted to a private, especially when the capture of the notorious outlaw who had led them such a merry chase seemed imminent, the lieutenant turned on his heel without replying, starting down the mountainside at a run.

Shouting and yelling in jubilation at the thought they would soon have the notorious outlaw securely bound and on his way back to the jail from which he had escaped, leaving a trail of corpses behind him, the troopers swarmed after the half-breed.

"I wish you'd hold 'em back, sir," exclaimed Alkali to the captain, who with several other officers was following close at the scout's heels.

"Why?"

"Because I want to examine the entrance to the Cave to find if Red is really in there. But if them troopers crowd round, they'll spoil any tracks there may be."

Realizing that Alkali spoke sound sense, the captain faced about.

"No man can come nearer the Cave than twenty feet until I give permission," he shouted.

Amazed at the command, the troopers asked one another what new development could have transpired. But their curiosity was quickly allayed by the sight of the half-breed creeping about on his hands and knees.

Interest in the scout's discoveries was forgotten for the moment by the officers as they felt a sudden outpouring of air, followed several seconds later by a sucking downward of the atmosphere.

"What in the world can that be?" they asked one another.

"It's the 'Breathing Cave,'" grunted Alkali; in explanation.

"It sure is just like a person breathing," asserted Captain Smythe, after he and several of his companions had dropped to their knees near the crevice in the rock and

felt the outward and inward rush of air against their faces.

"How did you know about it, Alkali?" demanded another officer.

"Injuns."

"Did they give any explanation of the mystery?"

"Some did, some didn't."

Further discussion of the wonder was prevented for the moment, at least, by the arrival of Colonel Edwards.

"Have you got the devil cornered, Smythe?" he asked of the officer.

"I believe so, sir."

"Believe? Don't you *know*?" thundered his superior.

"No, sir. I'm waiting for Alkali to determine whether Rogers has entered that opening in the rock or not."

"Well, I guess the surest way to put an end to him is for the earth to swallow him," chuckled the colonel.

"What do you find, Alkali?"

"He's in there, and there are two others with him. I—"

"Any sign of the three Mounted Scouts they captured?" interrupted Captain Smythe.

"They was dragging something with them. You can see where the dirt over there is scraped. But whether it's the Scouts, I can't say, sir."

"We'll probably find their bodies somewhere down the trail," opined the colonel. "It isn't likely they would have bothered with them when we were pressing them so close. But you're sure Red Rogers is in there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any other way to get into the Cave?"

"Not as I know of, sir."

"How big is it?"

"Never was inside."

"Well, there's one sure thing. Rogers and his companions can't find any food in there."

"Captain Smythe, you will pick thirty men and stay here, camped about the opening to this Cave, until you either starve Rogers out or to death."

cause of their fearlessness and deadly marksmanship, the colonel gave the command for the rest of the men to return to the base of the mountain and camp for the night.

"Shall you want Alkali?" he asked, as he prepared to follow them.

"No, sir. That is, I don't think so. You said there was no other entrance to the Cave, didn't you, Alkali?" the captain asked, turning to the half-breed.

"None as I knows of," repeated the scout.

"Then I don't see how Alkali can be of any use to me, Colonel Edwards."

But the officer was soon to regret his decision to dispense with the services of the half-breed.

Wearied with the labors of the strenuous day, now that they felt they had the notorious outlaw in their power, or at least where he could do no more harm, the troopers rolled themselves up in their blankets and were soon fast asleep, while a solitary sentinel stool guard over the crevice, at the two ends of which fires had been kindled.

Within the Cave, however, all was activity, though the outlaw and his companions had passed through an even more nerve-wracking day than their pursuers.

The haven which Rogers had reached barely in time to save his life was one that he and his former gang had chiselled from the solid rock. Scarce twenty feet long was it, but it extended back for at least twice that distance. The phenomenal breathing of the crevice afforded a constant change of air, thus enabling them to burn candles which had been left when it was one of Rogers' regular hiding places before his capture.

Lighting several of these, he bade Rose prepare some food, while he stood as near to the entrance as he dared in order that he might hear what transpired among the troopers in the event of their trailing him to the Cave.

And could they have seen the smile that spread over his face as the half-breed declared he was ignorant of any other means of departing from or getting into the retreat, Colonel Edwards would never have called off the manhunt.

"It's a lucky thing for me that I ran across Faro Pete and put him out of the way," chuckled the bandit to himself. "If I hadn't, old 'turkey gobbler' would have had me like a rat in a trap. As it is, I'll be able to pull off a few stunts that will give him an awful jar."

From where he lay, he could hear almost every word that the manhunters said, and again he grinned as the order to lay siege to the Cave was issued. And when all was quiet and only the guard was astir, he returned to

CHAPTER XI.

THE OUTLAW BECOMES SUSPICIOUS OF ROSE.

After the captain had selected the troopers whom he wished to keep with him, all of whom were chosen be-

his companions, to whom he quickly related all that had transpired.

"Let them keep up their old siege, if they want to," exclaimed Rose, as the outlaw concluded. "We've got food enough in that bag for a couple of days, anyhow, so we can just stay here and get a good rest. I sure do need it, and I guess you and Pedro do, too, Red."

"Sleep won't seem a bit bad, especially as it will be the first I have had outside a jail for five years," agreed the outlaw.

"But what are you going to do with the scouts?" demanded Pedro. "It won't do to take the gags out of their mouths or to let 'em loose."

"And they'll lower our supply of food," interposed the girl.

"It looks as though old 'turkey gobbler' would starve his own men and not us," chuckled the outlaw. "Still, there's no hurry about deciding what to do with them. They can't do any damage, that's certain. After I take a look round to-morrow and see how the land lays, we can attend to them."

Preys to all sorts of hopes and fears, Jennings and Scotty had passed through an ordeal during the last hour such as seldom falls to the lot of any human. The sight of their comrades beating the mountainside for their captors had inspired them with hope for their own rescue. When Rogers had decided to take them with him, they still clung to this hope. But as the pursuit grew closer, they were in terror lest the outlaw put a bullet into each of them and thus rid himself of the handicap they were to his escape. With the realization that they would probably be kept to serve the purpose of their captor, after they heard from his lips that there was a different place to enter the Cave than the one the troopers were besieging, they lost heart, however. And as their hunger increased with the savory odors coming from the food that Rose was preparing, they wished that the notorious outlaw had, indeed, ended their suffering.

But they were to find that Rogers was not utterly without feeling.

As Rose announced that their meal was ready, the desperado walked over to where the scouts lay.

"I reckon you fellows are a bit hungry," he chuckled. "Now, I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take the gags out of your mouths and give you something to eat. I'll also remove the bandages from your eyes. It won't do you any good to yell or cry out, because we've got enough shells and bullets in this Cave

to hold it against a regiment. Besides, if any of your friends up above tried to get in here, unless they struck one particular place, they'd fall way down, clean to hell, I guess. So you see, it won't do you any good to try to start something."

"But they might let 'em know there was another way to get into the place," interposed Pedro.

"Little good it would do 'em," returned his chief. "They could search a month of Sundays and never find it."

"Still, they might get word to the Fort and then old 'turkey gobbler' would order the men out again, which would interfere with our going where we pleased," objected Rose.

"Reckon you're right, girl. It will be a big sight easier for me to carry out my plans if I don't have a bunch of manhunters to dodge for a while."

"Say, you fellows," he exclaimed, turning toward his captives, "if you make any attempt to communicate with the guard up there, I'll chuck you down that crack in the rock—and no one ever comes back from there. So be good and you'll be a big lot happier. Perhaps, if you're real good, after I've carried out my pledge, I'll let you loose. You're a mighty entertaining couple of chaps, but I can't say I should care to have to tote you about with me all the rest of my days, especially as the way you're toggled up is something likely to attract attention."

His words disclosing that the outlaw was in rare good humor, the scouts wisely decided not to bring down his wrath upon them, and accordingly when they were placed at the table and the gags and bandages were removed, they made no outcry, eating gratefully the food which the girl and even Rogers fed them.

But the outlaw's leniency would go no further, as Rose found when she pleaded with him to remove the thongs from their arms and ankles and allow them to stretch their aching limbs.

Indeed, the request seemed to revive his earlier suspicion of the girl.

"Say, what's the matter with you, anyhow, girl?" he demanded. "Here, just because I fed the poor devils, you seem to think I should turn 'em loose. Pretty soon, I suppose you'll be asking me to go to that guard pacing back and forth and give myself up." Then an idea seemed to strike him, and, with a disgusting leer, he said: "I believe this doll-faced kid here has hypnotized you."

"Well, I know he isn't the kind of man that would

make you sleep all trussed up the way you've got him," flashed Rose, blushing at the outlaw's words.

"You're dead right, he ain't," retorted Rogers, "because he ain't the sort of chap who would ever catch a man to bind him."

And laughing at his words, evidently considering them mighty clever, the bandit got up from the table, ordered Pedro to place the prisoners on some straw, and threw himself down upon a pile of blankets, keeping his eyes upon Rose, however, till her breathing indicated that she was asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLOSE CALL.

Despite his bravado evinced before his prisoners and the girl, Rogers did not feel as secure in the "Breathing Cave," as his words made him appear. Consequently, though he was wearied by his unusual exertions after his long confinement behind the bars, he was awake early the next morning.

Arousing Pedro, he bade him keep a close watch on the girl and the scouts, and not to let them converse unless he was within hearing distance.

"I'll watch 'em, never fear," promised the bandit.

"See that you do. Your life is responsible for their safety," returned his master. And with these words, the outlaw walked to the end of the cave opposite the crevice by which he had entered, placed his shoulder against what seemed part of the solid wall of rock and, after several attempts, pushed out a block about three feet square.

Cautiously sticking his head through the trap door, Rogers listened intently for several minutes and then, apparently satisfied it would be safe for him to go forth, squeezed through the hole, closing it behind him.

But he was by no means out of danger.

The spot where the second entrance to the Cave was located was less than a hundred yards from where Captain Smythe and his troopers had established their siege camp, and was in full view from the valley below where the rest of the troopers had bivouaced.

Yet, unless they had chanced to see him suddenly appear from the rock, he ran little risk of detection from

the latter, for he quickly gained the shelter of a crag, where he waited to learn if an alarm was raised.

When some five minutes had passed and the silence which enveloped the mountains and valleys was unbroken, he began his descent.

With all the cunning of which he was master, the dare-devil outlaw crept down the hillside, crossed the level land and then went up the other mountain in order that he might learn whether or not any troops had been stationed to watch the trail to the Old Stockade.

As he found the way entirely open, he was sorely tempted to pay a hurried visit to the place which had been his headquarters and the scene of many a wild orgy before he had been captured, but he told himself there would be plenty of time to live over the old days when he had fulfilled his pledge and accordingly he retraced his steps.

But the outlaw found that it would not prove so easy a matter to regain the Cave as it was to leave it.

When he reached a spot on his return whence he could survey the valley where the troopers had camped, instead of finding it deserted, as he had expected, he found it alive with cavalymen.

Wondering as to the cause, yet aware that it effected him, Rogers sought out a rock from which he could watch the manhunters.

Had he returned an hour before, however, he would have found his progress unimpeded.

After breakfast, Colonel Edwards had given the command to break camp and return to the Fort, ordering the men to keep a sharp lookout for the bodies of the three Mounted Scouts, who had been captured by the outlaw.

When the search failed to reveal them, as the reader knows, both officers and men came to the conclusion that Rogers had kept them with him, and many were the speculations as to his reason for so doing.

About an hour had they been on the march, when a solitary rider was sighted. More out of curiosity than anything else, Colonel Edwards trained his field glasses upon him. But as he did so, his manner changed.

"By all the gods of war, that's our man Shaw!" he gasped, "and he's bound, gagged and blindfolded. That's the work of that devil, Rogers! Lieutenant Hastings, take three men and see what's the trouble."

Like wildfire, the identity of the horseman had spread among the cavalymen and eagerly they watched as the detail dashed on its mission.

The strain of the terrible night when he knew not

what moment might be his last had proved too much for the Scout, however, and when his comrades gained his side, he was jabbering to himself, a raving maniac.

Calling down all the curses of which they could think upon the head of the desperado for his treatment of their fellow, the officer and his men quickly, but tenderly, removed the gag, bandage and rawhide, then lifted the scout from his horse and laid him on the plain, forcing some brandy between his swollen lips, all the while plying him with questions. But it was no use. Shaw could only jabber.

Realizing from the troopers' actions that something serious was amiss, Colonel Edwards and his aides rode up just as one of the men picked up the message Red Rogers had written, which had passed unnoticed in the endeavor to restore the Mounted Scout to his normal self.

"A communication for you, sir," said Hastings, handing the rough scrawl to his superior.

Adjusting his glasses, the colonel began to read it, then burst into a towering rage.

"Listen to this! Listen to this!" he roared, addressing all within earshot. "'Colonel Turkey Gbler. I cum bak to keep my promise to a ded man. Yu no whu i mene, barney Landon, the man you cudnt get the reward for becoze i hid his body. im going to fix evry man who helped do barney. I am kepeing 2 of yure men. if yu get after me, ill send em bak to yu in peces. if yu wil leve a safe condukt for rosie landon to ole man quints friday i wont turn no tricks on yure post. Red Rogers.'"

As he proceeded, the colonel grew madder and madder, fairly screaming as he finished.

"Think of it! That to me!" he chortled. "We'll go back and smoke that devil out, if it takes every man on the post. Hastings, give the orders. Send two men to the Fort with Shaw."

Not a man was there who did not consider Red's message a personal insult, regardless of poor Shaw's treatment, and never were commands more willingly obeyed than those to ride back to the Breathing Cave and capture the daredevil bandit.

Pitching camp in the valley, the troopers quickly swarmed up the hillside to the Cave, and it was almost at the moment of their arrival that Rogers had caught sight of them.

As the officers reached the spot where the outlaw was supposed to lie hidden, they immediately held a council of war, discussing the quickest means of bringing the desperado to book. Many were the schemes suggested, but it was finally decided to begin by trying literally to smoke him out.

The men were ordered to collect piles of dry branches which were jammed as tightly as possible into the crevice in the rock and then set afire.

At the sight of the flames and the realization of the troopers' purpose, the outlaw leaped to his feet.

"Daylight or no daylight, I've got to save Rosie and Pedro!" he muttered, and, never thinking of the danger to himself his act entailed, he began to work his way to the Cave.

With marvellous skill, he descended the hill, crossed the valley in which was located the camp, and crept up the other side. But every trick of which he was master he was obliged to use. Indeed, no less than three times, troopers passed within pistol shot of him, yet never even a suspicion did they have of his presence.

But when he seemed to have success within his reach, he was balked. Less than thirty yards was he from the secret entrance to the Cave when some of the men began to gather brush just above it. And, cursing frightfully, Rogers was forced to seek cover.

Fortunately for the girl and men within the Cave, the mysterious breathing of the crevice kept the greatest part of the smoke from entering the excavation in which they cowered.

Surprised to awake and find the outlaw gone, Rose grew more and more uneasy as time went by without his return, and when the men began to jam the brush into the crevice, she was beside herself with fear.

"There's no use of worrying," declared Pedro. "If they'd caught him, they wouldn't be trying to suffocate him." And, so self-evident was this argument that the girl took courage.

It was not until dusk, however, that Rogers finally found the opportunity to re-enter his hiding place. And his arrival was just in time, for his comrades were all but overcome with the smoke.

The sight of the outlaw unharmed, inspired them with hope, and eagerly they followed him from the Cave.

And, because of the darkness, they experienced but little difficulty in reaching the trail to the Old Stockade, and in due course arrived at that nigh-impregnable fortress.

CHAPTER XIII.

A REIGN OF TERROR.

Perched almost on the top of a rock-crowned mountain, from a distance the Stockade looked like a boulder, a fact that doubtless accounted for its never having been discovered by any of the Scouts or plainsmen. Not a tree was there within rods of it, so that surprise was out of the question, a condition that had made it so valuable to the gold miners who had used it as a refuge against Indians, and one that had recommended it to the notorious outlaw as the headquarters for his band, and the strong box for his ill-gotten gains.

So jealously had Rogers guarded the secret of its whereabouts that he had always insisted that members of his gang should be blindfolded before he would lead them to it, and thus no one but himself knew the exact trail which he had learned from an old Indian squaw whom he had helped to get revenge upon the chief of her tribe.

Even Pedro did not know how to reach it, and it was, therefore, with deep disappointment that he heard Red order him to bandage the eyes of the prisoners and Rose, and was in turn blindfolded himself.

When these precautions had been taken, the outlaw took a turn with a rope round the waist of each, and thus kept them together and guided them.

On pain of death for any attempt to run away, the

Scouts had been allowed the use of their legs by Rogers, in order to facilitate the escape from the Cave. But, because of the numbness caused by the length of time their ankles had been bound, Jennings and Scotty found it difficult to climb the tortuous trail, and it was after midnight before the creaking of a door told them they had reached their destination.

"Stay where you are for a few minutes while I see that all is right," commanded Rogers, dropping the rope.

Wondering whether this was the preface to some terrible deed of treachery, the four stood still, fearing to move.

But their alarm was unfounded.

Lighting a torch, of which there were many in this lofty stronghold, the outlaw went from window to window, making sure that the shutters of iron were in place, that no rays of light might be radiated and thus disclose the location of the Old Stockade.

So well had his gang, who were practically his slaves, fashioned them, however, that they were still sound, and, returning to his companions, he removed their bandages, revealing to their eyes a scene of barbaric splendor. Rugs of finest weave and costly furs covered the floor. Exquisite tapestries adorned the walls, and scattered here and there were glorious statues and ornaments of rarest stone, silver and gold, all the loot of Red Rogers' raids which had often carried him into Mexico.

In speechless amazement, Rose and the Scouts gazed about them.

"Like it?" asked the outlaw, enjoying their surprise. "If you will be good and do as I say for a few days, until I finish my business, I will divide them among you. I'm going away, and shall not have any use for them."

"Pedro, go and bring some wine. You fellows give me your word you won't try to run away, and I'll sever your bonds. Will you do it?"

"Oh, do," implored the girl. "It will seem just as though we were living a fairy tale in some enchanted palace to be up here—only if your arms are bound, it will spoil the illusion."

"And if we don't?" demanded Jennings.

"It won't make any difference to any one but Rosie."

I shall give Pedro orders to shoot any one of you who tries to run away. So it's up to you to decide whether you'll be comfortable or not."

"Sort of heads I win, tails you lose, eh?" returned Scotty, to whose youthful imagination, Rose's play-dream appealed strongly.

"That's about it, I reckon," grinned the outlaw.

For several minutes, the Scouts were silent, both loath to give their word to a man than to kill whom nothing would bring them more pleasure. But, at last, solacing themselves with the thought that a promise given to a desperado was no promise at all, they agreed, and Red cut their bonds.

Almost at the same time, Pedro returned bearing a cobweb-covered flagon and some goblets wrought from pure gold, which he filled and passed about.

"We'll drink to the success of my pledge," exclaimed the outlaw, raising the goblet to his lips. "I'm going away to-night," he continued, as he set the golden cup upon a stand. "When I'll be back, I can't just tell. Until I do, you are all to stay here. Pedro, I shall make your life pay forfeit for any escape. If any or all of the three try it, drop them in their tracks. Keep all the weapons in the chest, and don't let the key leave your person."

"But suppose you don't come back?" asked Jennings, significantly. "Do you think we are going to spend the rest of our lives here?"

"Oh, I'll be back, right enough," returned the fearless bandit. "Yet, if you think some of Turkey Gobbler's men may get me, I'll leave it this way—if I'm not back again in three days, you may go back to your Fort. I may send you, anyhow, if your colonel is reasonable. That's why I brought you, to make him reasonable. You can divide the stuff here. There's only one condition that I'll make. You must agree to keep Rosie from arrest because of her assistance in getting out of jail."

"I'll agree to that," exclaimed Scotty, with an eagerness that made the other men laugh, and sent a flush to the girl's cheeks.

"Good! But don't bank too heavily on it, for I shall return."

"How about food?" inquired Rose, as the outlaw walked toward the door.

"There's enough in that canvas bag. I helped myself to some of the troopers' stores while I was waiting to get back to the Cave. When I come back, I'll bring more."

And opening the door, the desperado stepped forth into the night.

Familiar with every rock and pebble in the trail, Rogers descended rapidly to the valley.

"Guess I'd better have a mount," he muttered to himself, as he came upon a dozen or more of the cavalry horses.

Having a wonderful power over animals, the outlaw was able, by speaking soothingly, to pick out a horse, just as he had done to the Mounted Scouts, and was soon threading his way up the trail down which he had fled the day before.

Riding with caution until he was out of danger of discovery by the troopers, Rogers headed his mount for the cabin of old Quint, which he reached just at daybreak.

"Go into the woods and up to the spring," piped a shrill voice from behind a half-opened window shutter, in response to Rogers' three taps on the door. "I'll follow right along."

Quickly the desperado obeyed, and was soon joined by a small, hunched-backed man with long gray hair and beard.

"I've been expecting you ever since I heered the news," said he, without any word of greeting. "But you can't stay here."

Though Quint had always been a man of few words, he had, nevertheless, been the one friend in whom Rogers placed implicit reliance. Indeed, the old man had planned many of his raids, sharing royally in the loot, and the brevity of his greeting piqued the outlaw.

"Who said anything about staying here?" he demanded, angrily. "I've got other business."

These words seemed to bring great relief to the old man.

"Just come to say good-bye, eh? Well, I wish you luck. Anything I can do for you? Need any money?"

"Not a cent. But I tell you what I do want. I want

to know where I can find Jerry Hooper, Zeb Cross and Al Bender."

These were the names of the three plainsmen who had killed Barney Landon, and as he heard them, Quint looked at the bandit keenly.

"Take my advice, and you'll leave well enough alone. This region is getting mighty hot for you. Better get out before they carry you out," he exclaimed, significantly.

"Thanks, I don't want advice," grinned Rogers. "I want to know where I can find those three fellows."

"You'll find them on their ranches, jest as they used to be."

"Much obliged. Oh, there's another thing you can do for me, Quint. You can go to the Fort and tell Edwards, with my compliments, that he's wasting time trying to smoke me out of the 'Breathing Cave.' Also tell him I'm sorry I had to take another one of his horses."

"So Edwards thinks you're in the Cave?" asked the old man, chuckling. "Sure, I'll be glad to get word to him. I wish he'd been mixed up with Barney. I don't know a man I hate more'n I do Hiram Edwards. Yes, I'll sure let him know."

"Thank you. Good-bye." And with a wave of his hand, Rogers dashed away through the woods.

For a while, he smiled as he pictured to himself the scene between the pompous colonel and the little old man; then became grave as he thought of the mission upon which he was riding.

Though Barney Landon had been a desperado, he had been accused by Zeb Cross of lifting some cattle—and wrongly. Cross, however, lured by a reward, had persuaded Hooper and Bender to waylay the outlaw. This they had done, wounding him grievously. But Landon had managed to ride to where Rogers was spending the night, and died in his arms, after which the outlaw hid his body so that no one could collect the reward.

Before his pal's death, he made him a pledge, and in attempting to carry it out, traveled to the city of Keno, where he had been arrested by twenty Mounted Scouts, but only after he had shot down ten others.

And now, at his first opportunity, this man, whose mind and ideas were so perverted that he preferred a life of crime to one of honor, was taking up the quest again.

Nearest of any of the three was Al Bender's ranch, and thither Rogers rode, recking not that it was broad daylight.

To his delight, Bender was standing in the doorway as the outlaw dashed up.

"Your time has come, Al Bender!" he hissed. And, before the terror-stricken man could escape, Rogers put a bullet through his heart.

"There's one, Barney!" he murmured, as he rode away. "Now, for Zeb Cross!"

Night had fallen before the outlaw reached his destination. Riding boldly to the door, he banged on it with his gun butt.

"You?" gasped the ranchman, as he beheld the red-bearded desperado.

But the bark of a pistol was his only answer.

Never heeding the cowboys who rushed to learn the cause of the shot, Rogers raced to the horse corral, hastily cut out one of the ponies, and was away before the people on the ranch had realized what had happened.

"That makes two," he chuckled, grimly. "I only hope Jerry Hooper is at home."

Unfortunately for the man, Red found him returning from a tour of inspection of his cattle at noon the next day.

Recognizing the outlaw from afar, Hooper tried to race away from him. But in vain.

"Now, I can face Barney," exclaimed Rogers, setting his pony toward the Old Stockade.

As the reports of the murders were received, people who had ever been concerned in any trouble with Rogers or Landon feared for their lives, and a veritable reign of terror seized the region.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RAID ON THE OLD STOCKADE.

Although posses were formed and troopers thrown on the outlaw's trail, he managed to evade them, though sev-

eral times they got near enough to shoot at him. But, with that perversity of Fate which seems at times to guard and protect wrongdoers, bring suffering upon the honest, he escaped to his fortress on the rock-crowned mountain unscathed.

Yet, in his very hour of gloating, his nemesis was stalking him.

When they awoke the morning after Rogers' departure, Scotty sought out Rose.

"What claim has Red Rogers got on your, that you stick to him?" he demanded.

"No man has any claim on Rose Landon!" flashed the girl, flushing at the question.

"Then why do you go round with Red?"

"Because he has been good to me. He stood by me and gave me money so I could live an honest life when no one else would have anything to do with me, because I was Barney Landon's daughter."

"But it's no way for you to live, girl," exclaimed the Scout. "He's sure to get caught. It's only a question of time—and not so very long a time at that, and then you'll be branded as his sweetheart."

"It's a lie! I'm no one's sweetheart!"

"But people won't believe that—and then what will you do?"

"Oh, don't! What right have you to talk to me like this, anyway?" demanded Rose.

"The right my love for you gives me."

"How dare you talk to me of love?"

"Because I mean it. You're too fine a girl to have your life blasted by Red Rogers. I want to save you."

There was that in the passionate tone in which the young Scout spoke, and in the expression upon his handsome face that drew Rose to him, irresistibly—and then the thought of taking her place among the good women of the world—a thought that always strikes hardest the woman who sees the opportunity being closed to her, flashed to her mind.

"How can you help me?" she asked, in a voice scarcely more than a whisper.

"I can make you my wife. Then I shall have the right

to protect you. Oh, Rose, think what joy it would be. Don't say we haven't known each other long enough. Think what we've been through."

"But what would Red say?"

"What can he? We can go before he gets back and be married."

"But you gave him your word not to. And there's Pedro. He would shoot you."

"A man isn't supposed to keep his word to a murderer and robber. As for Pedro, I guess Jennings and I can fix him. Will you, girlie? Tell me quick before we're interrupted."

A moment Rose hesitated.

Then, with a happy little catch in her voice, she breathed:

"Yes."

But, before they could seal their betrothal with a kiss, Jennings appeared.

Keeping his secret, Scotty said:

"Let's lay for Pedro and do him up. Then we can get away, obtain reinforcements from the camp in the valley and raid the Old Stockade when Red Rogers gets back."

With a scowl, the scout nodded his head toward the girl.

"Don't worry about her. She's going with us," smiled the youngster.

"Really?"

"Yes," answered Rose.

"Good. Then let's start right now. I just saw Pedro sneaking off down the trail. By keeping our eyes open, we can get out of this place and hide until he returns, and then go on our way without danger."

No sooner had the plan been suggested than it was agreed upon.

"I wish we could take some of these things," sighed the girl, as she took a parting survey of the costly furnishings.

"Never mind, now. We'll come back for them."

And, without delay, the trio fled from their prison. Cautiously they advanced until they found a rock behind

which they could hide, and there they remained until Pedro passed them.

Deeming the chance unequalled to learn the trail, the outlaw's trusted man had gone down the path, noting its every wind and turn. As this had taken longer than he had anticipated, he made all haste possible to get back.

And when he found his prisoners flown, he was panic-stricken.

"Red said my life would pay if they got away!" he wailed. Then suddenly the thought flashed into his mind that he, too, could make his escape and thus avoid the wrath of his master—and packing up everything he could carry, he fled.

With untoward incident, the Mounted Scouts reached the camp of their comrades with Rose. Their story was quickly reported to the colonel, and they were immediately summoned before him.

Upon the young Scout's statement of his engagement and as a reward for the information in regard to Rogers' retreat, the commandant of Fort Griswold agreed not to have the girl arrested.

"There's one thing I should like to ask, sir," stammered Scotty, as they started to leave the presence of the colonel.

"What is it?"

"That I be allowed to act as guide when you raid the Old Stockade."

"All right, you may. Now, leave me."

The story of the young Scout's romantic wooing was soon spread among the troopers, and they all clustered to congratulate him—and when they beheld the beauty of the girl, they envied him.

But Scotty's love-making was cut short.

Word of Rogers' murders was received by the colonel, together with the information that the outlaw was heading for the foothills again.

Selecting fifty powerful, dead-shot scouts, the commander put them in charge of Lieutenant Hastings, with Scotty as guide.

"You best start right away," he added, after announcing the detail. "If you get there before Rogers,

you can hide in the Stockade and seize him when he comes in. Remember, I want him alive!"

But though they made all speed, the Scouts found that the murdering outlaw was before them.

Sighting a light from a door of whose existence he had not dreamed, Scotty crept toward it.

In a trice he whipped out his "Colts" and aimed them within.

Wondering that he did not shoot, his comrades glided to him, and the sight that met their gaze astounded them.

With chin resting upon its hand sat a skeleton across a box of gold, seemingly staring at the Scouts. And before them both stood the outlaw, evidently having just entered.

"I have kept my pledge, Barney!" cried Red Rogers. "I've sent your murderers to hell! Now, I can take my gold and bury you."

As he spoke, Red Rogers stared at the skeleton, then ran his fingers gloatingly through the gold coins.

This mercenary act shattered the spell that held the Scouts immovable.

"Hands up!" yelled Scotty.

Like a flash, the outlaw wheeled.

"The tables are turned!" smiled the young Scout, grimly. "You're *my* prisoner, now!"

Realizing that resistance was vain, Red Rogers chose the end that suited his terrible career.

"With a mocking laugh, he dashed past Scotty, straight toward the muzzles of the fifty rifles.

"Fire!" rang out the lieutenant's voice.

Crash! went the guns, and Red Rogers pitched forward, his body riddled.

The raid on the Old Stockade had been successful!

Rose and Scotty were soon married, and the girl was later awarded a large portion of the gold found in the outlaw's lair.

For a few days Pedro managed to escape the troopers, but he was finally caught and sent to prison for the rest of his life.

THE END.

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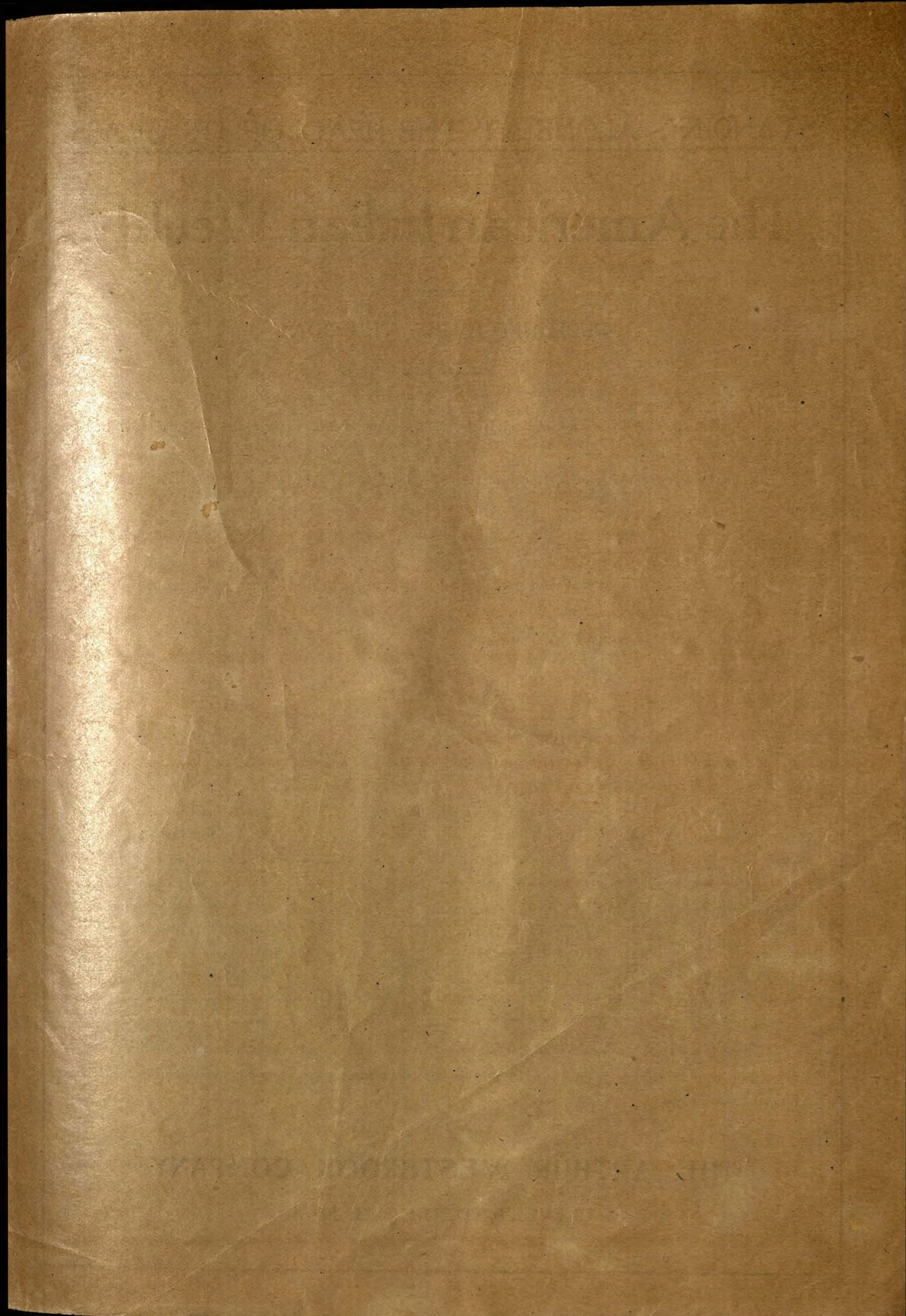


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